THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT: AN ASSESSMENT OF AFRICAN INCULTURATION THEOLOGY FROM A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: Date:

Abstract

Christian faith knows and worships one God known in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. In his revelation, the Father is depicted as being from Himself, the Son as eternally begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit as eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. This is what Christian thought means by the doctrine of the Trinity. Although Christian orthodoxy holds the doctrine of the Trinity, the intellectual tools used to capture and convey it vary depending on the epoch, cultural context as well as availability of alternative intellectual images.

This point is demonstrated well in Western Christianity. Western theologies exhibit three models of the doctrine of the Trinity: 'God as Essence', 'God as an absolute Subject', and 'God as Community in Unity'. These models can be explained by the influence of specific philosophical presuppositions preferred in certain contexts and at certain times. 'God as Essence' is constructed from the point of view of neo-Platonism, 'God as an absolute Subject' uses the infrastructure of German Idealism, while 'God as Community in Unity' recovers and applies the conceptual tools of the second-century Greeks.

Taking note of the theological methodology of Western Christianity and recognising the intellectual resources in the African heritage, African inculturation theology has argued for the use of the conceptual framework of African peoples in the development of theology for African audiences. In an attempt to make a statement to the effect that African Negroes are not neo-Platonists, German Idealists or the Greeks of the second century, and to demonstrate that the African Negroes do have a different ontology that can be deciphered, interpreted, and systematized in one common way, African inculturation theology has posited a simple identity between the African notions of God and God known in the Christian faith.

This research assesses and finds inadequate the notion of a simple identity between the African concepts of God and the Christian understanding of God. In view of this it appeals to African inculturation theology to critically and creatively deal with the African Christians' understanding of God. This call means at least two things. Firstly, Nyasaye, Mulungu, Modimo and so on are to function as the conceptual gates for the Christian view of God. This

calls for 'Christianisation' of the African notions of God. Secondly, a 'Christianised' Nyasaye, for example, must for the Luo people mean God known in the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The 'Christianised' Nyasaye must then make use of native metaphysics for the purpose of indigenising or grounding it in the cultural milieu of the situation of reception. To achieve this goal, this research has located and proposed the NTU metaphysics, which is used widely by African Negroes. According to this metaphysics, God is not just a static 'substance', an authoritarian 'absolute Subject', or a mere relationship; God is 'Great Muntu'. The Son is God because he derives wholly from the whole NTU of the only 'Great Muntu'. The Holy Spirit is God because he has the NTU shared by both the 'Great Muntu' and the Son. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons because the 'genuine muntu' in them is the 'Great Muntu', who alone is the ultimate person. Thus the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons in the ultimate sense.

Opsomming

Die Christelike geloof ken en aanbid een God in die Seun deur die Heilige Gees. In sy openbaring leer ons die Vader ken as synde uit Homself, die Seun as van ewigheidheid verwek deur Vader, en die Heilige Gees as van ewigheid uitgaande van die Vader en die Seun. Dit is wat die Christelike geloof bedoel met die leer van die Triniteit. Alhoewel die Christlike ortodoksie gekenmerk word deur die leer van die Triniteit, varieer die intellectuele vorm wat dit aanneem en waarin dit oorgedra word afhangende van die tydperk, kulturele konteks sowel as die beskikbaarheid van alternatiewe intellektuele aparatuur.

Laasgenoemde kom duidelik na vore in die geskiedenis van die Westerse Christenheid. In die geskiedenis van die Westerse teologie vertoon die leer van die Triniteit drie gestaltes nl. 'God as Essensie', 'God as absolute Subjek', en 'God as Gemeenskaap in Eenheid'. Dit hou verband met die voorkeur vir spesifieke filisofiese voorverondersellings in sekere kontekste en tye. 'God as Essensie' is die resultaat van neo-Platoniese voorveronderstellings, 'God as absolute Subjek' dra die kenmerke van die Duitse Idealisme, terwyl 'God as Gemeenskap in Eenheid' terggryp op en gebruikmaak van die konseptuele aparatuur uit die Griekse denke van tweede eeu.

Na aanleiding van die teologiese metode van die Westerse Christendom en met erkenning van die intellectuele moontlikhede van die Afrika erfenis, argumenteer die Afrika inkulturasie teologie ten gunste van die gebruik van Afrika konsepte vir die ontwikkeling van 'n teologie vir Afrika. In 'n poging om die eie en gemeenskaplike aard van die ontologie van Afrika in onderskeid van die neo-Platoniste, Duitse Idealiste en Griekse filosofie van die tweede eeu, aan te toon, het die Afrika inkulturasie teologie op 'n simplistiese wyse 'n identeit tussen Afrika Godsbeelde en die God van die Christelike geloof geponeer.

In hierde navorsing word hierde identifikasie beoordeel en van die hand gewys. Derhalwe word 'n appel gemaak op die Afrika inkulturasie teologie om krities-kreatief om te gaan met die Afrika Christene se verstaan van God. Hierde oproep het ten minste twee implikasies. In die eerste plek moet Nyasaye, Mulungu, Modimo, ens. dien as konseptuele poorte vir die Christlike Godsverstaan. Dit impliseer 'n 'Christianisering' van die Afrika Godsbeelde.

Tweedens bring dit mee dat 'n 'gechristianiseerde' Nyasaye by voorbeeld, vir Luo volk impliseer dat God geken word in die Seun en die Heilige Gees.

Vervolgens moet gebruik gemaak word van inheemse metafisika met die oop op die verinheemsing of fundering van hierdie 'gechristianiseerde' Nyasaye in die kulturele milieu van die resepsie gemeenskap. Om hierdie doel te bereik, word in hierde studie gebruik gemaak van die NTU metafisika, wat algemen in Afrika voorkom. Volgens hierde metafisika is God nie net 'n statiese 'substansie', n' outoritêre 'absolute Subject' of 'n blote relasie nie, maar God is die 'Groot Muntu'. Die Seun is God omdat Hy volkome uitgaan uit die totale NTU van die enigste 'Groot Muntu'. Die Heilige Gees is God omdat Hy die NTU het wat die 'Groot Muntu' en die Seun gemeenskaplik besit. Die Vader, die Seun en die Heilige Gees is persone omdat die 'egte muntu' in hulle die 'Groot Muntu' is, wat allen die absolute persoon is. Derhalwe is Vader, Seun en Heilige Gees persone in absolute sin.

Sola Deo Gloria!

I wish to register my sincere thanks to all the individuals and institutions who contributed to the succesful completion of this study. Prof PF Theron, thank you for your fatherly guidance and great insights in Dogmatics. Prof CM Pauw, this study benefited so much from your indepth grasp of the dynamics of interaction between Christianity and the African intellectual culture. The African Theological Initiative (ATI), your three-year grant provided the funds that this study could not have done without. The Tear Fund (UK), you faithfully supported this study from its humble beginning as an MTh thesis through the DTh dissertation. Daystar University, I am grateful for the three-year leave (1998-2000) which freed me up for this study. Our friends, colleagues and relatives, thank you so much for the encouragement that you were throughout this process. My wife Pamela and our children Leonida, Philip and Samwel; you were always there for me although I was not always within reach

Nyasaye! I cannot think of you

> … without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of him as a whole … I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one luminary, and cannot divide or measure out our undivided light (Gregory Nazienzen, *Oration* 40.31)

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0 Prologue

0.1 Preliminary Considerations: Africa, African Peoples and Theology

It is important at this early stage that we put into proper perspective the terms Africa, African peoples and African theology. Today, some African philosophers are of the opinion that the term 'Africa' is enigmatic. VY Mudimbe, in his study on Latin nomenclature, notes that in the sixteenth century dictionaries the term Africa is treated in texts as "the equivalent of *Afer,* as substantive as well as adjective, and simply designates any person from the continent regardless of his or her color. It literally translates, *Africanus*" (Mudimbe, 1994:26).

Whereas the Latins understood Africa as *Afer* and the persons from the continent as *Africanus*, the Greeks called the African continent Ethiopia (*Aithiops*) because the people living near the sun must have been affected by the heat (*calore*), thus the 'burnt' pigment (*colore*). The decline of the use of the name Ethiopia for the African continent only began at the time of the inception of European exploration. The Europeans favoured *Nigritia* (from the Latin *niger*) as the name for the continent and called the inhabitants *Nigriti* (Mudimbe, 1994:27). VY Mudimbe thinks that the European *Nigritia* and *Nigriti* are simply used as the equivalents of the Greek *Aithiops* – face burnt by the sun. PD Curtin has a different opinion. As far as he is concerned, the Europeans favoured *Nigritia* because at the time of the European exploration there was a general xenophobia and widespread doctrine of racial differences (Curtin, 1964:28-57).[1] It was therefore important that the Europeans found a term that could distinguish Africa and the Africans from Europe and the Europeans as precisely as possible. By the eighteenth century, the Europeans had settled on *Nigritia* and *Nigriti* because the term had the concepts of primitiveness and savagery as additional nuances (Mudimbe, 1994:27,28).

[1] The xenophobia the Europeans experienced in their encounter with the Africans and which resulted in the Europeans naming the Africans *Nigritia* was felt by the Africans also. The eastern Bantu peoples and the Waswahili at the coast of Kenya and Tanzania called Europe 'Uzungu', and the Europeans 'Wazungu'. The word 'uzungu' literally means "strangeness, unusualness, novelty, peculiarity" (Rechenbach, 1967:608). The term 'mzungu' also has the nuance of spirit, since spirits are strange and they often perplex (Scott, 1929:348). However, when the eastern Bantus talk of 'mzungu' in reference to the Europeans or the white people in general, they may mean 'spirit' in the metaphorical sense of the word, but in a direct sense what they mean is 'stranger'.

Although the European explorers favoured *Nigritia*, it must be emphasised that the term *Africa* had been in use since Roman times. The Romans knew *Africa* as one of their provinces. For the Romans, the term *Africa* was an effective replacement of the Greek term *Aithiops* (Ethiopia) or the Egyptian word *Libya* (the land of *Lebu* or *Lubius* in Genesis). The term *Africa*, however, was not applied to the whole of the African continent until the end of the first century before our era (Ki-Zerbo, 1981:1). And so the use of the term *Africa* or *African* is not strange. This research uses the term 'Africa' to mean the conventionally recognised land mass and near shore islands and 'African peoples' to refer to the varieties of negroid people indigenous to the African land mass. The map below best captures this description of Africa:

See Esterhuysen, 1998:21, fig. 16

This understanding of Africa assumes a fundamental unity of the African peoples.[2] That unity cannot just be reduced to the slavery and colonialism Africa experienced in its encounter with the West. The unity of the African peoples is noted in the genetics of the African Negroes, the African religions, the African languages and the African conceptual framework.[3] In the words of J Ki-Zerbo,

> ... ever since prehistory, despite natural obstacles and the low level of techniques, there has been a degree of historical solidarity on a continental scale, between the Nile valley and the Sudan on the one hand and the Guinea forest on the other; between the Nile valley and East Africa, including among other things the dispersion of the Luo, between the Sudan and the Central Africa, through the diaspora of the Bantu; and between the Atlantic and east coasts, through transcontinental trade across the Sahara. Migration, which took place on a large scale in both space and time, is not to be seen as a vast human tide attracted by emptiness in its wake. Even the torrential saga of Shaka, the Mfecane, cannot be interpreted only in such terms (Ki-Zerbo, 1981:21).

The question of the indigeneity of the African peoples was previously raised in the context of the Hamitic theory, according to which the African peoples are supposed to have originated from Asia.[4] Modern studies on Africa, however, indicate that the peoples of Africa are for the most part indigenous and of a common genetic stock.

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[2] Not all scholars agree with the idea of the unity of Africa. The pluralists are of the opinion that the African "cultures differ and each has its own coherence and distinctive truth-functional way in which it conceives of and expresses its world" (Bell, 1989:365)[2]. In frustration, the pluralists at the extreme end of the continuum posit the view that the term *Africa* does not, as a matter of fact, make much sense beyond a reductionist use. Anthony Appiah, Mudimbe and Sam Maluleke seem to be of the opinion that 'Africa' does not exist as such and that what people call Africa is a form and shape for the Africa they desire (Maluleke, 1997:6f). EE Evans-Pritchard's work amongst the Azande and the Nuer and Marcel Griule's work amongst the Dogon of Mali and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) are important contributions to the issue of the diversity of the African peoples and their cultures. Other important contributions to the pluralistic-universalistic debate are Peter Winch, 'Understanding a primitive society' in *Rationality*, Brian Wilson (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970) and M Hollis and S Lukes, *Rationality and Relativism*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

[3] This research rejects the stereotypical image of Africa according to which the term 'Africa' means poverty, hunger, backwardness, bad governance, disease, racial-tribal-national tensions, fear, evil and death. This long held dogma of African exceptionalism must be rejected as Africa cannot just be defined in terms of multifaceted pauperization. And neither can we just define 'African' in terms of shared slavery and colonialism as Appiah seems to suggest (see Maluleke, 1997:6). There is more to Africa than pauperization and the Western domination of Africa. As Ki-Zerbo has explained, we do not reject the stereotypical images of Africa merely to settle scores. Our purpose of understanding Africa in terms suggested in this research is "... to change perspective or revive images which have been forgotten or lost. We must turn once more to science in order to create genuine cultural awareness. We must reconstruct the real course of events. And we must find another mode of discourse" (Ki-Zerbo, 1981:2). Scholars of African religions, ethnophilosophers, modern historiographers and ethnolinguists believe that because of the shared cosmology, Africa is not as diverse and divided as we have been made to believe. On the basis of a shared intellectual culture, we may confidently talk of 'African Christianity', 'African theology', 'African philosophy', 'African literature' or simply 'African'.

[4] Commenting on the words 'Hamite' and 'Hamitic', P Diagne says "... the words have been used to excess in learned language and everyday speech in the Western world for centuries. This usage originated in a garbled and

> According to Boyd, the author of the genetic classification of human races, there exists only one negroid group, which spreads over the whole of the sub-Saharan part of the continent, ... and it differs significantly from all the other major groupings. Research by Hiernaux has yielded remarkably convincing evidence to support this proposition. Without denying that variations are apparent at local levels, he has produced the findings of an analysis of 5050 distances between 101 populations to show the uniformity of the peoples of the sub-Saharan hyperspace which embraces the 'Sudanese' as well as the 'Bantu', the inhabitants of the coastal regions and those of the Sahel, the 'Khoisan', Pygmies, Nilotic, Fulani, and various minor groups such as those akin to the 'Ethiopians'. On the other hand, he also shows the great genetic distance that separates 'Asian blacks' from African blacks (Ki-Zerbo, 1981:268).

Whereas the African blacks people sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab-Berber group (Libyans, Semites, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, etc) occupies the Saharan Africa.[5]

From the study of the African languages today, semantic anthropology or the science of ethnolinguistics has divided the African Negroes into four distinct linguistic groups: Khoisan, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic and Niger-Congo (see the map of Africa and Appendix 1). As far as the semantic anthropologists are concerned, the Nilo-Saharan and the Niger-Congo phyla in fact belong to a single language family called Congo-Saharan or Zindj group (Olderogge, 1981:283)[6]. The Afro-Asiatic phylum is clearly a mixture of the Arab-Berber group and the

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tendentious reading of the Bible and was responsible for the myth of the curse on the black descendants of Ham. Although the term took on a seemingly less pejorative meaning and at least lost its religious connotation as a result of the researches of the nineteenth-century linguists and ethnologists, it has still continued to be used for discriminating between certain black peoples who are regarded as being superior, and the rest. In any event, the International Scientific Committee is giving encouragement to the critical studies being conducted into the historical uses of the term, which can only be used with express qualification" Diagne, 1981:n.37).

[5] EW Smith, *The Christian Mission in Africa* (London: The International Missionary Council, 1926) indicates that the Le Zoute Conference identified two indigenous race types on the continent of Africa: The Libyan peoples and the Negroes (Smith, 1926:7). The Roman Secretariatus Pro Non-Christians expressed a similar view in 1968 (see 'Secretariatus Pro Non-Christians', *Meeting the African Religions*, Rome, 1968:7). The African historiographers working for the UNESCO project published as *General History of Africa* vol I: *Methodology and African History* (California:UNESCO, 1981) are emphatic that the indigenous African peoples cannot be divided into more than two race types. The two African race types they have identified are the Arab-Berber group and the Negro group (see Ki-Zerbo, 1981:267).

[6] Between 1949 and 1950, JH Greenberg, using the method of mass comparison while taking into consideration the basic features of grammatical structure and especially vocabulary, distinguished sixteen linguistic families (Niger-Congo, Songay, Central Sudanic, Central Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Afroasiatic (Hamito-Semitic), Click, Maba, Mimi of Nachtigal, Fur, Tmainian, Kordofanian, Koman, Berta, Kunama, and Nyangiya). In 1954 he narrowed these to twelve (Niger-Kongo, Songay, Macro-Sudanic (Eastern Sudanic, Central Sudanic, Berta, Kunama), Central Saharan, Afroasiatic, Click, Maban, (Maban, Mimi of Nachtigal), Fur, Temainian, Kordofanian, Koman, Nyangiya). By 1963, this number was again reduced to only four (1. Niger-Kordofanian -- –Niger-Congo, Kordofanian; 2. Afroasiatic; 3. Khoisan – Click; and the rest were grouped under 4. Nilo-Saharan) (See Greenberg, 1981:308). As far as Edgar Gregersen and D Olderogge are concerned, this number can be reduced to three basic families – 1. The Afro-Asiatic (Semito-Hamitic), 2. Zindj or Congo-Saharan (these are the groups formerly classified by Greenberg as Niger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan), and 3. the Khoisan. According to Olderogge, the Zindj or the Congo-Saharan family display the same type of coherence

Nilo-Saharan and the Niger-Congo Negroes, while the Khoisan phylum[7] reveals interesting interactions, particularly with the Niger Congo phylum of the African peoples.

Looking at the previous map of Africa, one readily realises that the Negroes of the Niger-Congo phylum and those of the Nilo-Saharan phylum, who together constitute the Zindj group, occupy the largest landmass. This group is also the majority in terms of numbers. The Zindj group has over the years expanded its geographic and cultural ranges at the expense of the Khoisan. As is evident from the map, the Afro-Asiatic languages are spread over a substantial area, much of which is desert. The speakers of the Afro-Asiatic languages are also considerably fewer in number.

If the geographical and the numerical superiority of the Zindj group as a common language family is of statistical significance, and if we agree with the notion that in the historical process of divergence among the African peoples there was also convergence and reconvergence, then it is possible to argue that the ontology of the majority of the African Negroes can be deciphered, interpreted and systematized in one common way. The 'common language family' used by the majority of the African Negroes[8] means that we have a common crystallizing point for the intellectual and material tools of the majority of the African peoples. This conclusion is important for this research, since at a later stage we will talk of a common African conceptual framework, which will in turn make it possible for us to talk of African theology.

Talking of African theology means that we have to apply ourselves to a particular definition of the term. Within the African scene, there are at least six theological paradigms. Justin Ukpong has identified African inculturation theology (focusing on theology and the problem

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we see in the Indo-European family (see Olderogge, 1981:283)

[7] See D Olderogge's interesting study on the difference between the Khoi-Khoi and the San (Olderogge, 1981:279-282) as well as the interactions of these peoples with the other African Negroes.

[8] It is important to note that the term 'Negro-African' is used here in the same way as 'Zindj'. D Olderogge, in proposing the term 'Zindj' as a replacement of 'Negro Africa' notes that the term 'Negro Africa' is not appropriate because the so-called Negroes of the Americas and parts of Africa speak different languages and the term Africa includes all inhabitants of Africa, including the Berbers to the North and the Afrikaners in the South. Moreover, the Negro-African languages cannot be divided into two (Sudanic or Nilotic and Bantu) because although the Nilotic and the Bantu have differences, they have common fundamental features (see Olderogge, 1981:282,283).

of cultural identity), Black theology (dealing with the problem of race and colour), and Liberation theology (addressing the problem of poverty and injustices) (Ukpong, 1984). To these three we could add African women theology (handling the problem of gender), Evangelical theology (seeking to refocus the African Christian thought on the biblical faith) and Reconstruction theology (attempting to engage theology in a serious dialogue with democracy, human rights, law-making, and nation-building).

This research applies the term African theology to what appears in Justin Ukpong's classification as African inculturation theology. In this paradigm of theological reflection, theology is made to penetrate the traditional philosophical thought common to the African peoples. It is therefore a theology that understands and appropriates the historical divergence of the African people without taking for granted the fact that African peoples do have a common intellectual crystallizing point. In order for theology to be African, theology must penetrate and make use of the infrastructure of this intellectual crystallizing point. As Ukpong explains, this takes place when the theologian is involved in:

> ... re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation as contained in the Scripture and tradition are critically re-examined for the integration of faith and culture, and from it is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach, therefore, African theology means Christian faith attaining African cultural expression (Ukpong, 1984:30)

Notable theologians who identify with this paradigm and call it African theology are JS Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, GM Setiloane, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako.

0.2 Defining the Problem

The problem of this research is how to express the doctrine of the Trinity using African metaphysics. Christian theologies rooted in the scriptural testimony and passed on through generations to our own time generally view the God they relate to within a perplexity of unity and plurality. The orthodox Christian faith presents the Father as God, the Son as God, and the Holy Spirit as God, yet it is not three gods but one God worshipped in the Trinity. How do we translate this truth into the African thought forms? Is it possible to utilise the African

conceptual framework in translating the doctrine of the Trinity instead of using 'the being' of Neo-Platonism or 'the self-consciousness' of Hegelianism?

The theological questions that dominated the Christian scene from the very early stages are: "Is the divine that has appeared on earth and reunited man with God identical with the supreme divine, which rules heaven and earth, or is it a demigod?" (Pelikan, 1971:172-175). How does this divine relate to the Holy Spirit? (Pelikan, 1971:213-215). These questions led the Church to the belief that there are three Persons in the Divinity. If ever we were to represent this concept in terms of a mathematical formula, Henry believes that that formula would be 3x in 1y and not 3x = 1x as has been done traditionally (Henry, 1982:165).

Of course the need to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity using the African conceptual framework does not just arise because of the difficulty created by the traditional formula of the doctrine of the Trinity. Even if we adopted Henry's formula (3x in 1y), the problem of the religious language[9] will still persist. Because of the problem of the language of the formula of the doctrine of the Trinity, some notable critics of the doctrine of the Trinity have advanced the view that the latter is 'the most enigmatic Christian doctrine' (see Hall, 1997:26-28). Others think it is 'a mathematical monstrosity' (see Henry, 1982:165), while still others are of the conviction that it is 'the most brutal and inexcusable error in counting' (see Yandell, 1994). For such critics, explains Hall,

> ... the Trinity is the great unknown. The Trinity, to use a familiar equation, is viewed as a riddle wrapped up inside a puzzle and buried in an enigma. A riddle for how can any entity be at the same time multiple (three) yet singular (one)? A puzzle for the

[9] What really is brought to the fore here is the problem of religious language. S. McFague believes that the Western society has this problem, because in the first place it is unsure about God and then it is unsure of its language about God. The problem of the religious language therefore originates at the experiential level, and soon it spreads to the expressive level (1983:1- 4). The Christian faith has responded in different ways to this problem. Thomas McPherson has identified at least four responses to this problem. The first position believes that the Christian doctrines have absurdities or paradoxes that cannot simply be expressed by language. The second position argues that what is really important is Christian life. Christians and the theologians are exhorted to be as children and to stop worrying about the absurdities and paradoxes. The third response understands that the Christian doctrine has difficulties but sense can be made of the difficulties if we allow for the analogical language, that is words whose meanings are derived from their application to finite things in everyday speech. The last response is that posited by Positivism - there is no point in trying to express the inexpressible ("Positivism and Religion" in *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge,* 1986). The third response is the most popular one. The basic argument of this position is that speakers of all languages have different ways of speaking depending on what may be obligatory or appropriate.

> Trinity is so clearly contrary to any rational thought as not to warrant a second thought from sensible people. An enigma, for even if the Trinity could be understood, of what practical value, even what religious value, would it have for ordinary people? (Hall, 1997:26).

Such misgivings about the practical value and the intellectual coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity are based on a wrong point of departure. The starting point of the doctrine of the Trinity is not the theological formula 'one God, three Persons'[10]. The beginning point of the doctrine of the Trinity is the fact that God has revealed himself as one and yet we in the Christian faith have experienced him as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Within the African context, the various African peoples know God by such names as Modimo, Nyame, Nyasaye, Ngai, Mulungu and so on [11](see Appendix 2). A name like Mulungu, for example, simply means God. According to DC Scott, Mulungu does not mean "... different forces of nature, not spirits, not fetish, but God, the Creator, Spirit, Almighty, Personal God. ... you can't put the plural with God because God is one. There are not idols called gods, and spirits are spirits of people who have died, not gods" (Scott, 1929:348). The African Christian thought has Christianised[12] the traditional concepts of God so that Mulungu, for example, is not just God as the traditional Nyanja community knew him. On the

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[10] Traditionally the theological formula 'one God, three Persons' has been represented by 3x = 1x. A formulation done according to this mathematical procedure could easily be interpreted as saying that the Trinity is about 'three gods are one' or 'three isolated persons are one God'. To think along such lines is to be indifferent to the voice of the Christian orthodoxy. Just what this plurality in unity and unity in plurality entails for spirituality, thought and religious language, is what is wrapped in the historical-theological concept that has become known to us as the doctrine of the Trinity.

[11] Christoph Barth argues that the name Yahweh did not drop from heaven, "... it was God himself who came down. Revealing himself to Israel he adopted Israel's language. His name is rooted in this language. It is taken from words and names in the daily speech of the Hebrews" (1991: 71). Moreover, the fathers of Israel had no problem whatsoever in invoking Yahweh by divine names that originated in the religious life of the neighbouring gentiles.

[12] By 'Christianised' we mean the translatability of biblical ideas of God into the African vernacular languages. It is important to note, however, that the African vernaculars use the personal names for God the African peoples know in a way that is neither wholly different from nor wholly the same as the idea of God in the Bible. Aristotle believed that in the realm of conversation, when applied to two things one and the same word may sometimes carry the same sense in both applications, but sometimes it might bear completely different senses. In the former case, the word would be said to have been used univocally, while in the latter situation the word is used purely equivocally. But in addition to these two uses, Aristotle also distinguished a third use where a word is applied to two objects in senses that are neither wholly different nor wholly the same. When such a use occurs, the word is said to have been used analogically. (see Eric L Mascall, "The Doctrine of Analogy" in *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge*, edit. Santoni, RE. London:Indiana University Press, 1968)

contrary, Mulungu now means the God of the Christian worship as the Nyanja people know him.[13] The problem, however, is that African Christian thought has only gone half way with the Christianisation process. A fully Christianised concept of Mulungu, for example, should indicate how Mulungu (God) has made himself known in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.[14] And moreover, such a view of Mulungu should be articulated within the infrastructure of metaphysics that the Nyanja as a people can decipher. [15] According to David Bosch this step would be important, as it is an effort to incarnate the Gospel in the African cultural milieu and incarnating the Gospel in any cultural milieu is an indelible mark of Christianity. In fact, as Bosch has observed, it comes

> ... as no surprise that in the Pauline churches Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians, and Romans were able to feel at home (cf Korster, 1984:172). The same was true of the post-apostolic church. The faith was inculturated in a great variety of liturgies and contexts - Syriac, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Maronite, and so forth. Moreover, during this early period the emphasis was on the local church rather than the church universal in its monarchial form (Bosch, 1991:448)

This research therefore attempts to address two related issues. The first has to do with how to fully translate the Christian view of God into African cultures that already have some ideas of God. We have already noticed that so far African inculturation theology has been able to indicate the lines of similarity between the African concepts of God and the God of the Christian worship. African inculturation theology, however, has yet to articulate the areas of

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[13] The African concepts of God, as Dickson has observed, are not borrowed from outside (Dickson, 1984). Mbiti did his research among more than 270 African ethnic groups and came up with the conclusion that African concepts of God 'sprung independently out of African reflection on God' (Mbiti, 1970:xiii). This is also the point of EW Smith's *African Ideas of God* (1950).

[14] For instance, in order to emphasise the new nuance Mulungu has attained due to the process of Christianisation, it is important that Mulungu be explained in Trinitarian terms. Karl Rahner believes that a Christian view of God first of all "[confirms]. .. that knowledge of the unique, transcendent, personal God which is always stirring into life whether naturally or supernaturally. . .. Secondly, the Christian conception will always express God's passionate protest against every kind of polytheistic or pantheistic deification of the world. . .. Thirdly, it will alone be able to say unambiguously and definitively just how the personal, transcendent desires *in actual fact* to stand to the world in his sovereign freedom: namely as the God who actually discloses his inmost self to man out of grace. .. as the God who gives his definitive sanction to the world in the incarnation of his Son and summons it to share in his Triune life" (Rahner, TI I: 85, 86).

[15] As Hendrikus Berkhof (1985) has noted, the German Theology, the Anglo-Saxon Theology, the French language Theology, the German language Swiss Theology and the American Theology are in fact distinct European theologies paralleling African theology. They developed using the infrastructure of the European languages, cultures and metaphysics. It is therefore not strange that we should call for the infrastructure of the African cultures and metaphysics to be used to formulate theology for the African context.

divergences between the African concepts of God and the Christian view.[16] How the African audiences may understand the Christian concept of God expressed in the African cultural milieu then becomes our next concern. This is important since research indicates that the average African Christian still understands God in the African sense.[17] Of course, what African Christians need is not African concepts of God; what African Christians need is a clear picture of the Christian view of God. Fortunately, it is possible to transpose the Christian idea of God into the conceptual framework of every culture without it losing its original flavour (Sanneh, 1989). Kwame Bediako has also demonstrated with much care and precision that the Church fathers transposed the Christian message from its original Jewish matrix into the categories of understanding of Hellenistic culture without viewing the latter as hindrance to the Gospel. Bediako, specifically proposing a method of contextualizing theology for the contemporary African situation, argues that an analogous kind of reconceptualization is required if the Gospel would be made intelligible to the African audiences (Bediako, 1992 and 1995).[18]

Might it be true that what Africa needs today is not just an African contribution to discourses on the doctrine of God, valuable as such an undertaking may be, but a theological

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[16] Of the three African theologians studied in this research, Mbiti is the most prolific and yet he has nothing outstanding on the Holy Spirit, only two known articles on Christ as he is experienced in the life of the African Church (Bediako, 1992) and of course several works on the African concepts of God. Idowu's approach is basically the same as Mbiti's. His project is primarily God as he is understood by the traditional Africa (Idowu, 1962;1965;1975). He only has, as Bediako has ably observed, "... scanty speculation on Christ [and] the Holy Spirit ... as items of doctrine in themselves" (Bediako,1992). Setiloane has keen admiration for Idowu (Setiloane,1976; 1986), thus his works on the doctrine of God are unavoidably in a similar constellation as Idowu's. In fact he is even reluctant to study the Holy Spirit (Setiloane, 1979:65).

[17] There is a large bibliography on the persistence of the African traditional religiosity. Some important readings in this respect are JS Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969:xi; JU Young, "Out of Africa: African Traditional Religion and African Theology" in *World Religions and Human Liberation*, ed. D Cohn-Sherbok, 1992:96; A Shorter, "African Traditional Religion: Its Relevance in the Contemporary World", *Cross Currents*, XXVIII: 4 (Winter 1978-79:421-431); A Shorter, "Problems and Possibilities for the Church's Dialogue with African Traditional Religions" in *Dialogue with African Traditional Religions*, ed A Shorter, 1975:7; C Kibicho, "The Continuity of the African conception of God into and through Christianity: A Kikuyu case study" in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds E Fashole-Luke, et al, 1978:370-388; JM Waliggo, "Ganda Traditional Religion and Catholicism in Baganda, 1948-1975", *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds. E Fashole-Luke, et al, 1978:413-425; E Ikenga Metuh, "The Gods in Retreat" in *Continuity and Change in the African Religions—The Nigerian Experience*, 1985; and L Magesa, *African Religion*, 1997:4-14.

[18] Charles Kraft argues that "... it is less Scriptural to preserve western Christianity in Africa than to adapt it (like Paul did). . .. Use African culture for Christ. Don't abandon it.... there are riches in African life and culture that can make Christianity so much more alive, so much more Biblical, than it has ever been before. It could be so much more attractive to the remaining three-fourths of African peoples than made in 'Europe' Christianity" (Kraft, 1976:290,291). As for Bediako, the fact that the Gospel is translatable means that Christianity is not foreign to Africa (see Bediako, 1992 and 1995).

contribution which explains how Africa understands God expressed in Trinitarian terms, both for the 370 million Christians in Africa today[19] (see appendix three) and for the global theological situation? We believe that the African Christians must be given a chance to intellectually understand and appropriate the significance of the Christian understanding of God in its full array; and to then tell their own story about how they understand the Trinitarian view of God. After all, the Trinity is at the heart of the Christian faith and if we are ever going to give an account of our faith we will have to grapple with what to make of the Trinity. Moreover, today's reflections on the doctrine of God within the Christian thought the world over seem to be gravitating towards the Trinitarian concept of God. Moltmann set this ball rolling in 1981 when he bemoaned "... the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity has been neglected by various models of contemporary theological discourse" (Moltmann, 1981). In the past ten years alone, Christopher Hall has noted that

> Catherine LaCugna, Thomas F Torrance, Thomas Marsh, Colin Gunton, Christoph Schwobel, Peter Toon, Millard Erickson, Jung Young Lee, Ted Peters, Alan J Torrance, Thomas G Weinandy, and Roderick T Leupp have authored or edited significant works devoted specifically to the Trinity. Other writers such as Clark Pinnock, Donald Bloesch, Alan F Kimel, Charles J Scalise, and Philip Walker Butin have explored Trinitarian connections to broader theological, historical, cultural, and hermeneutical issues and figures (Hall, 1997:26).

African theology has not been involved in Trinitarian discourses even though the discussions have been going on for about two decades. Perhaps the question that should get us going in this regard is: If God has acted to save humanity in Christ in the manner we see in the New Testament, what are the implications? As far as Marsh is concerned, the answer to this question is simple: the Son saves people in a way that only God does. He must be God (see Marsh, 1994). This was also the beginning point for Athanasius in the fourth century (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1. 4 – 19, 25 – 34, 2. 57f.; 3. 1 – 6; 4. 1 – 10) and John Calvin in the sixteenth century (Calvin, *Institutes* I. 13. 12f). With the rest of the Christian community, the African Church must stop being indifferent to the implication of the great salvation of Jesus Christ on the Christian view of God. Our question as African Christians should be: "How can we most effectively, truthfully, and reverently speak of the wondrous

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[19] See David B Barret's prediction, "AD 2000:350 Million Christians in Africa" in *International Review of Mission*, 59 (1970), 39 – 54. Barrett revised the figure of 350 million in his *World Christian Encylopedia* (WCE), Nairobi, 1982. He further revised his WCE statistics, publishing them in the *International Bullentin of Missionary Research*, January 1997 and January 1998. The figure of 370 million is a calculation by JS Mbiti (1999:1) based on the 1998, 1997 and the earlier statistics of Barrett.

God we worship as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit on the basis of the biblical testimony itself?" (Hall, 1997:27).

0.3 Research Hypothesis

The working hypothesis of this study is the view that the doctrine of the Trinity is the normative Christian understanding of God and that the doctrine must not only be articulated for the African peoples using the infrastructure of the African conceptual framework, but that the African theological situation must seek to promote such a formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The model of theological reflection is not new. Sanneh and Bediako have proposed it for the African theology and given it the necessary academic grounding (see Sanneh, 1989; Bediako, 1992 and 1995).

The theological basis of this theological model is the Christian notion of revelation. On the basis of revelation, Sanneh and Bediako agree with older African theologians like Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, and Gabriel Setiloane, who had earlier advanced the view that, like all men everywhere, the traditional Africans too received and perceived God's revelation. This is a basic truth that cannot be denied. To deny that the African peoples received and perceived God's revelation is to doubt the humanity of the African peoples and it could as well amount to rejecting the authority of the Scripture which comes from the position that God is proclaimed to all men everywhere in nature (Psa. 19:1-6, Rom. 1:20, Acts 14:15-17) and through conscience (Rom. 2:14f., Acts 17:21, cf Eccles. 3:11).

What the traditional Africa did not know is that God has ultimately revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This is a universal story of the Church and it is a truth that is of tremendous significance to the Christian faith, as is evident in the confessions of the Church. A theology that has not recognised that God became man and is worshipped in the Spirit stands suspect as far as the Christian faith is concerned. The African Christians must therefore view God not just as Nyame, Leza, Nyambe, Modimo, Nyasaye and so on. They must begin there but allow the facts of the incarnation and the Pentecost to radically modify their prior concepts of God. So, for instance, instead of the Sotho-Tswana's concept of

Modimo, the Sotho-Tswana Christians are to speak of the same Modimo having revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

But the willingness, for instance, to proclaim that Modimo has revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit comes with a challenge. The challenge is that we must understand adequately the African metaphysics and use it in telling the story of the Trinity. How do the African peoples speak of God? How do they speak of 'being'? How do they speak of 'person'? How we answer these questions is important, as the search for the answers forces us to go back to the basics of African metaphysics. Understanding the basic structure of African metaphysics and its dynamics allows us not only to effectively say how the African understands God, but it also facilitates the articulation of the relevant and appropriate meaning of personhood for an African reader.

Christianising the African concepts of God and expressing the new meaning to the African audiences using the infrastructure of the African metaphysics does not mean that we are challenging the appropriateness of the Western theologies. The issue we are raising here is the question of relevance and context. The Western formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity are relevant to the Western context (see Walls, 1976:183). What the African church needs, says Dick France, is "... more teaching and direction from within, not from without. It needs theology, its own African Christian theology. Until this is achieved, ... it will not grow in influence on the new Africa, and it will be increasingly dismissed as a legacy from colonial past" (France quoted in Adeyemo, 1995:5). Professor Mbiti, expressing similar sentiments, has stated that:

> Until we can cultivate a genuine Christianity which is truly MADE IN AFRICA, we will be building on a shallow foundation and living on borrowed time. Let it be said once and for all, as loudly as technology can make it, that IMPORTED CHRISTIANITY WILL NEVER, NEVER QUENCH THE THIRST OF AFRICAN PEOPLES. The wisdom of our forefathers speaks clearly about this in a proverb: "That which comes from charity is never sufficient to fill the granary". Africa wants and needs the Gospel. But Africa does not require imported Christianity, because too much of it will only castrate us spiritually or turn us into spiritual cripples (Mbiti, 1978:276).

Western theologies have a long history. They have been through the Neo-Platonic scholastic metaphysics that reached its peak in Aquinas. During the 17th and the 18th centuries they

went through the German Idealism -- a philosophical paradigm that seems to have won the admiration of contemporary Western theologians. Today most of the Western theologians clearly understand God in the 'self-consciousness' terms of philosophical Idealism.[20] Theological formulations done within the infrastructures of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and Hegel cannot be expected to be adequate for the African context, whose intellectual culture functions under entirely different philosophical presuppositions.[21] Professor Walls explains this very point in the following words:

> It is possible that from now on Western theology will be of little help to Africa. For one thing, Western theology has been for so long insufferably parochial; Western theologians defined Modern Man in terms of an assumed product of affluence, and it is a little late for them now to realize that for millions of modern men the demons, for instance, far from being irrelevant, are the very stuff of life. And Western theology has gone off in directions that are of doubtful relevance elsewhere. The separation of the Gospel from religion may be intelligible in the post-Christian West which provides perhaps the first known example of a religion passing away without being succeeded by another; but it does not readily find an echo in a continent saturated in religion (Walls, 1976:183)

The African Church is an offshoot of Western Christianity. This, and the historical connection between the West and Africa, has meant that the way the Western Church interprets the Christian story continues to heavily influence developments within the African Church up to this day. African theologians seem to agree that the theology we experience in Africa today is, to say the least, of Western origin. We are not blaming the Western church for having done her theology. We are saying that the African church has not done her

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[20] From the history of Western theologies we can learn the significance of native metaphysics in the formulation of theology. Right from the time of the Church Fathers, through the period of the Middle Ages to our own time, Western theology has constantly used the infrastructure of native European philosophies to express theological truth. The way the Western theologies use the European philosophies helps us to put two things into perspective. First, it confirms Robertson Smith's opinion that no religion starts with *tabula rasa* (Robertson Smith, 1923:2). But second, and perhaps the most important point, is that it encourages us to use our own native metaphysics in the formulation of theology aimed at our context.

[21] Placide Tempels once stated that the Africans live more by Being than by following their own idea (Tempels, 1959:23). Professor Mbiti has declared that the African is incurably religious. Religion, Professor Mbiti explains, 'permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it' (Mbiti, 1969:1, 262). The other African theological thinkers who believe that in African traditional societies, nothing can be explained outside the Supreme Being are JB Danquah and Bolaji Idowu (Danquah, 1968:2,3,16; Idowu, 1963:145,146). These scholars might have overstated themselves, however they have made an important point; namely that the part played by God and religion as an important phenomenon in the existence of the African is significant.

theology. Mbiti says that the African Christians "have a faith but not a theology".[22] Tite Tienou believes that the African Christians might as well be said to "have a theology of no theology!" (Tienou, 1982:46,47). Kinoti has observed that "the denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, the hymns we sing, the theologies which govern our beliefs and conduct, be they liberal or evangelical, are all made in the West" (Kinoti, 1994:74,75). While affirming the fact that the African church is a child of the Western church, it is important to indicate also that the African church must grow up. Growth here means cultivating theological thoughts that have taken due cognizance of the thought forms of the African peoples. After all, as Mbiti believes:

> The only tools needed to evolve a viable form of Christianity are: the Gospel, Faith and Culture. Thank God, we have these three fundamental tools now in plenty in our continent. ... What more then do we need? Why then do we need to continue living on borrowed Christianity when all the necessary tools are present with us? Thanks to God for His universal Gospel, thanks to the missionaries who brought it to our forefathers, thanks to the riches of our cultural heritage by means of which this Gospel can be understood, articulated and propagated. ... God has a thousand tongues in this continent by which to speak to us about the mystery of His will and plan for the world. If God did not speak through African languages, there would not be today the [370] million Christians on this continent. Let us therefore not put to silence any of these tongues by which he speaks (Mbiti, 1978:276,277).

What this means is that Christian orthodoxy does not have to remain in the terms of Neo-Platonism and German Idealism in order for it to express the Christian truth it is meant to convey. On the contrary, God has put within the African intellectual culture enough resources to allow for a full translation of the most complex of the biblical concepts into African frames of references. Kraft, using his expertise in cross-cultural communication, writes that:

> Communication is most effective when C[ommunicator], M[essage] and R[eceptor] participate in the same context(s), settings and frame(s) of reference. ... The sharing of cultural, subcultural, linguistic, and experiential frames of reference maximises the possibility that the cultural forms/symbols employed to transmit messages will mean the same thing to both C and R. Differences in the frames of reference of C and R assure that at least some of the symbols employed in M will be understood differently by the participants. If C's frame of reference is adopted as that in terms of which the communication is to take place, R must be extracted from his or her own frame of reference and indoctrinated into that of C. If R's frame of reference is chosen, C must learn whatever is necessary to function properly in that frame of reference (Kraft, 1979:149-150)

[22] Statement made by Prof JS Mbiti over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on 25 May 1985.

Besides Christianising the doctrine of the Trinity and using the African conceptual framework to articulate the Christian doctrine of God for the African context, we also have the conviction that the African theological situation must foster the doctrine of the Trinity developed within the infrastructure of the African metaphysics. Fostering this view of the doctrine of the Trinity involves a deliberate effort as well as getting the audience to have the right attitude towards the doctrine of the Trinity as a whole, and also towards the doctrine as it is formulated from the point of view of the African pattern of thought. Somehow theology has to find how this may be made possible. Perhaps the best way of fostering Trinitarianism is by being fluent with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, recognising the problems the African metaphysics raises for the doctrine of the Trinity, clarifying and representing the elements of the problem, proposing solutions to the problem, as well as revising, restating and re-evaluating.

0.4 Methodology

0.4.1 Principles of Research

0.4.1.1 Theology as *fides quarens intellectum.*

We proceed from the position of commitment to the Christian faith. Our starting point therefore is faith itself (see Berkhof, 1979:27). It is the faith that we have in God made known in Christ and worshipped in the Spirit that we seek to clarify, communicate and act upon. This also means that our evaluative and normative content must be limited to the provisions of the Christian faith itself.

0.4.1.2 Interdisciplinarity

First and foremost is a clear understanding of the substance of our discussion—the doctrine of the Trinity. Then we must pay attention to the cultural-historical developments in the Greaco-Roman world of the second and third centuries as contexts of the confessions of the Church. Thereafter, we need to apply ourselves to logic and critical thinking as tools of reflection. But these tools have generally been applied to distinct philosophical contexts: Neo-Platonism and Hegelianism. .A basic structure of Neo-Platonism helps us to see why

people like Augustine, Boethius and Thomas Aquinas took a certain view of the doctrine of the Trinity. Hegelianism helps us also to understand the recent formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially those of IA Dorner, K Rahner, K Barth, and even H Berkhof. Today, because of the difference of the nature of the African metaphysics, it is important that it be considered as a separate and distinct philosophical context. It is not possible to fully understand the African theologians' view of the doctrine of God if we do not have a proper perspective of the history of Africa and the presence, as well as the function of the African conceptual framework.

0.4.1.3 Theology for the African continent as a whole

The theology that we seek to develop is that which understands the historical solidarity of Africa on a continental scale (see Ki-Zerbo, 1981:21). The conceptual framework of the African Negroes is not shaped according to frontiers fixed by colonization. Anybody seeking to understand the cosmology of the African peoples must first of all comprehend the individual ethnic groups and their genetic relationships. The histories of the African peoples indicate diversity, but such differences must be understood in the context of convergence and reconvergence. In view of this, Olderogge has indicated that there are no fundamental racial and linguistic differences between the two major African Negro groups: the Nilo-Saharan peoples and the Niger-Congo peoples. Even the Khoisan race, whose history has generated difficulties for African historiographers and ethnolinguists, has in time evidently given and taken from a number of ethnic groups falling within the Niger-Congo phylum (see Olderogge, 1981).

And so, when we talk of the African inculturation theology, we have in mind a theology that does not just make sense to one of the four phyla of the African Negroes; on the contrary, we are talking of a theology for the Niger-Congo phylum of the African peoples, a theology for the Nilo-Saharan phylum, a theology for the Khoisan phylum, and a theology for the Afro-Asiatic phylum. We can reason this way because movements and interactions between the African peoples in time and space created divergences, but they also created convergences and reconvergences which resulted in a common intellectual crystallizing point for the African Negroes.

0.4.1.4 The African inculturation Theology is to be seen from within

One cannot speak of the African inculturation theology without granting it the right to be different (see Tienou, 1990:31). African inculturation theology is not constructed with the West, Asia or Latin America in mind; it is primarily an African theology, as the name suggests although like any other theology it seeks to convey a universal message. To maintain that the African theology must be seen from within is not to suggest a theological moratorium. The African church is a part of the Universal Church and therefore it is only logical that there be active and live theological connections between the two. The connections, however, must be maintained in terms of mutual exchanges and multilateral influences. In order for this to happen genuinely, it is important that the global theological situation should hear and receive some of Africa's contribution to the development of Christian thought.

0.4.2 The Resources

This research is a product of years of reflection on the doctrine of God. I come from a country that is overloaded with 'spirit movements' and 'messianic groups'. By 1973, of the total number of churches registered with the Kenyan government, the word 'spirit' appeared in 14% of all the denominations (Barret, 1973). Then we also have the problem of 'messiahs'. Well known 'messiahs' with huge followings are Simeon Ondetto of the Legio Maria Mission (Dirven, 1970), John Owalo of the Nomiya Luo Mission (Muga, 1975), and Alfayo Odongo Mango of the Musanda Holy Ghost Church (Barrett, 1973). Of course the 'spirit' and 'messianic' movements are not just a Kenyan problem; they are a problem of African Christianity. Hearing of supposedly Christian leaders like Isaiah Shembe of South Africa (Sundkler, 1961), Mapaulos of Malawi, Walter Matita of Lesotho, and Simon Kimbangu of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Martin, 1971), one is compelled to ask the question: What happened to the Christian view of the Trinity?

Furthermore, the context of the church in which I was raised caused me to grapple significantly with the problem surrounding the Trinity. This church, the Church of Christ in

Africa, has a very high regard for the Creeds. Since childhood, I recited the vernacular version of the Apostles Creed at every worship service. When I began theological education in 1984, I started to sense that we recited the Creeds without knowing what they really meant. As an ordained minister (since 1992), relating the religious thoughts of our people in their concrete situations to the Creeds confirmed my earlier observation. One area that was and still is a constant bother is how to use the African conceptual framework to reinterpret the Christian view of God. I have had the impression that although we have the right doctrine on paper, due to their heritage in African cosmology the worshippers do not really know what it means by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the church does not seem to see the need to use the metaphysics of the African peoples to express the doctrine of the Trinity.

Besides being an ordained minister, I have had the privilege of being lecturer in Systematic Theology, first at the Nairobi International School of Theology and now at Daystar University. In these institutions of Christian higher learning, both the lecturers and the student populations come from all regions of Africa. Thus, as opportunities opened, I had chances to engage in rigorous reflection on what God means to me as an African believer. My studies at the University of Stellenbosch have been extremely useful in forming my grasp of the doctrine of the Trinity. My Master of Theology mini thesis – *The Doctrine of God in Contemporary African Christian thought: An evaluation of the extent to which African theology is Trinitarian* (1997) furnished me with what I consider to be a very valuable foundation for this research.

Whereas this research was originally motivated by what I saw as an inadequate understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity among my own people, a further study of Trinitarianism indicates that I am not the first to have observed such a trend. The works that I found particularly useful are those of the Church fathers. Fortunately, the library at the University of Stellenbosch has the English versions of all the works of the Church fathers quoted in this research. The library also has the English translations of the important works of Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. Also available in the library are the English works by numerous authors on either the Church fathers or the Christian thinkers whose interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity have greatly influenced the Christian

thought. Within the library of the University of Stellenbosch, I was also able to locate most of the philosophy materials as well as the modern works on the doctrine of the Trinity cited in this research. In cases where they were not available within the university, I made use of the interlending section of the library.

0.4.3 Research Format

This research investigates its hypothesis in four parts. Part One discusses the roots of the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the role the Church fathers played in the formulation of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Part two attempts to show how the Western theologies have responded to the doctrine of the Trinity as it was formulated by the Church fathers. Part three deals with the doctrine of God as it is expressed in African theology. Part four is the original contribution of this research. It articulates the doctrine of the Trinity from the point of view of the African metaphysics and it suggests how the African theological situation may foster the proposal.

Part One of this research is entitled **The Doctrine of the Trinity — The Bible and the Church Fathers.** This part of the study has two chapters. **Chapter one** discusses the revelation of the Triune God of the Bible. The significance of **chapter one** lies in demonstrating the point that the doctrine of the Trinity does not have its origin in Hellenism or later European cultures, but rather that the doctrine has its source in the Bible. This chapter forms the basis of **chapter two**, which brings into focus the Church fathers and their contributions to the emergence of the doctrine of immanent Trinity. Particular attention is given to the basic aspects of the development of the doctrine and the movement from the Bible to the differentiated language of the Creeds. The point of this chapter is to show the kind of theological discussions that went on before the formulation of the doctrine of immanent Trinity as well as the role the Greek metaphysics played in the entire process. Whereas knowing the theological issues helps appropriate interpretation of the doctrine for the diverse situations of our own time, understanding the role the Greek metaphysics played in the formulation of the immanent Trinity frees us for the possibility of using our native thought patterns to articulate theological thoughts.

Part Two shows how the Western theologies have interacted with their own context as they reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity. **Chapter three** discusses the 'God as Substance' way of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity which came about as a result of the influence of the Neo-Platonic concept of 'substance'. This, in a sense, is the most widely held view of the doctrine of the Trinity. At the outset of the missionary century,[23] it was the predominant view. Thus the first missionaries to Africa had only this interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity to bequeath to the African church. **Chapter four** deals with Trinitarianism conceived from the point of view of Hegelian philosophy. Trinitarianism formulated using the infrastructure of Hegelianism sees 'God as an absolute Subject'. **Chapter five** is an attempt by some modern Western theologians who have rejected 'God as Essence' and 'God as absolute Subject' to recollect the form of Trinitarianism held by the Eastern Church - 'God as Community in Unity'. In a sense, the significance of this chapter is to indicate that although Western theologies have relied on native metaphysics to articulate their points of view, there are other Western theologians who are of the opinion that the Eastern Church's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity has invaluable merits. **Chapter six** indicates the 'Pertinent issues in the Western reinterpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity'. The basic thesis of this chapter is that Western theologies have different models of Trinitarianism depending on philosophical presuppositions; however, in spite of the differences, they still agree on the significance of the incarnation, the importance of the concept of *homoousios*, and the need to maintain Christian identity. This is an important lesson for our research. As we have noted with the Western theologies, we can use our native metaphysics in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as long as we recognise the significance of the incarnation, the importance of *homoousios*, and the need to emphasise Christian identity rather than cultural identity.

[23] The period generally associated with the missionary century is that which runs from 1800 to 1914. An interesting reading in this regard is KS Latourette, particularly volume 5 and 6 of his set entitled *A History of Expansion and Christianity* (*The Great Century: The Americas, Australias and Africa*, AD 1800-1914; and *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia*, AD 1800-1914)

Part Three is the contribution of African thought to the understanding of the doctrine of God. This part of the research identifies the African conceptual framework as an intellectual infrastructure that theology could use in reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity for the African context. It also takes note of gaps and inconsistencies that the African theologians bring to the Christian view of God. **Chapter seven** exposes the African metaphysics and challenges theology to take full advantage of it. The issue here is that theology in the West has generally used Neo-Platonism and Hegelianism. In the same way, the African situation can constructively use the African conceptual framework to reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity since it is available and it is capable of expressing the Christian thought to the African audience. **Chapter eight** limits itself to the discussions of three African inculturation theologians: Bolaji Idowu, John S Mbiti, and Gabriel M Setiloane. The basic proposal of these theologians is that the African peoples had traditional concepts of God. These concepts were not loaned from elsewhere as if God had left the African peoples without a witness of his presence. The biblical idea of God therefore does not have to be introduced to the African peoples in a way that is completely unrelated to what they already know. **Chapter nine** is an evaluation of the African inculturation theology's view of God. This chapter recognises that African inculturation theology is yet to view the doctrine of God as the doctrine of the Trinity and in addition, the chapter offers some reasons for the omission. The understanding of this chapter is that, if the reasons for the omission are identified and addressed, then the African theology would see the need to develop the doctrine of the Trinity.

The viewpoint in **Part Four** is that African inculturation theology must make use of the African conceptual framework to build biblical Trinitarianism. In order for this to take place, **Chapter ten** proposes that we must fully Christianise the African concepts of God and use the African metaphysics to explain the new meaning to the African audience. A fully Christianised concept of God would, for example, understand Modimo as the 'Great Muntu' manifested by the Son and the Holy Spirit. But having said that God is the 'Great Muntu' revealed in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, we must then be in a position to explain what to make of such an appearance by means of the instrument of African logic or theory of knowledge. The chapter suggests an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity formulated from the point of view of the African thought pattern and challenges the African theological situation in **Chapter eleven** to critically test and foster the proposal.

Part One

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY: THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH FATHERS

"The perspective in which the believer sees the story of Abraham, through the history of Israel, to Jesus and the history of the church and the history of their own lives, is an occasion for amazement at the continuity of the identity of talk about God. It is a perspective which does not go against the historians picture of history, but it can not be gained through studies in the history of religion. It arises out of the present worship of God and exerts pressure towards putting thoughts about the Spirit in the Church in a separate mental compartment with the appearance and activity of Jesus and the God of Israel and creator of the worlds.

This separate compartments is the so called doctrine of the Trinity, which should offer decisive theological help for believers and not ... be a hindrance and an additional difficulty. ... The God who comforts and heals, who brings about liberation and a new creation, is to be found in Israel, in the coming of Jesus and in the sending of the Spirit, with which the doctrine of the Trinity deals" (Ritschl, 1986:141-143).

1 An Analysis of the Biblical Roots of the Doctrine of the Trinity

1.1 Introduction

The issue of the biblical roots of the doctrine of the Trinity has to do with the question of the self-revelation of God. As Hendrikus Berkhof has well said, in revelation "we perceive not just a something, a segment of a divine mystery, but God himself, his heart, his deepest essence. We see in a mirror and thus do not see God face to face. But what we see in that mirror is God himself" (Berkhof, 1979:105). The Bible talks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a manner that maintains the unity of God and moreover, the Christian faith experiences God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1.2 The Term Trinity and its Relationship to the Bible

We have to deal here with the term 'biblical'. Just what does it mean to be biblical? The fundamental notion behind the idea biblical is the notion that a word or a concept is in actual fact in the Bible and because it is in the Bible, it is therefore authoritative (Greene-McCreight, 1997:296). This is not the position we intend to take since our interest is not merely semantics. Consequently, our interest is not to exegete the term 'Trinity' as such, for theology is not about semantics. Our interest is self-revelation of God, how the Scripture depicts the disclosure and how the Christian community experiences that self-revelation. God is both objectively and subjectively experienced as Triune. Thus, a fundamental question here is: Is the term Trinity biblical? Can the Christian reflection regard the notion of the Trinity as authoritative? Christian thought has offered diverse responses to these questions.

The Christian community experiences God in personal terms. CJ Webb thus prefers to call God who can be experienced in such terms a "personal God". According to him, we can only talk of a "personal God" because of "personal relations -- of worship, trust, love — between oneself and God" (Webb, 1920:70,73). These relations cannot be possible if God is not at work in the Word and the Spirit. Brümmer and Sykes also seem to hold this perspective. Brümmer believes that, in a way the experience of the Christ event, forces the Christian to see God as contextualised in Christ (Brümmer, "Identity", 1998:12). For Brümmer therefore, the

Christian experience of God influences and gives the Christian an entirely new way of viewing Christ-- he is Divine. According to Sykes, the attention the Christian pays to Jesus Christ to whom he/she has said 'yes' implies that Christ is to be understood not only as an authoritative exemplar, but more so as Divine (Sykes, 1984:255). And so for Webb, Sykes and Brümmer, what is revealed is God himself and the Christians, by their relation to God, experience this self-revelation daily[24].

Other equally respectable Christian scholars have argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is mere intellectualism. This group of thinkers points to the triad formula[25] they believe was widespread in the Greaco-Roman world of the postbiblical era as the source of a Trinitarian view of God. An example here is the South African theologian, Professor Gabriel M Setiloane. According to Professor Setiloane, the concept of the Trinity is to be located in the Greek metaphysics and is without biblical base whatsoever. Because of this conviction, Setiloane is of the opinion that the concept of the Trinity is of limited application and is inappropriate as a description of God as the African peoples know him (see Setiloane, 1979:65).

Another group of theologians is of the opinion that the doctrine of the Trinity resulted from the Christian misunderstanding of the concept of the 'One and the Many' found among a cross section of religious traditions. AR Johnson (*The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God:* 1961), for example, argues that the concept of social extension of personality found among the Hebrew and other Ancient Near Eastern cultures could be the explanation for the plurality in the Godhead which the Christian faith uses as one of its arguments for belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. Johnson (1961) explains at least four ways one may extend oneself and therefore be in a position to influence the society for good or ill.

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[24] Often 'experience' is considered to be the opposite of 'revelation', but 'experience' can also be used in a more encompassing sense. Used that way, 'experience' is not merely something subjective; rather, it includes the objective also. Everything we know falls within experience. I cannot be aware of anything outside my experience. I therefore 'experience' revelation also.

[25] The concept of the divine triad is by no means peculiar to the Christian faith. For instance, in the Indian religion we meet Brahma, Siva and Visnu; in the Egyptian religion there is Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Besides these historical religions, we know also that the neo-Platonic view of the Supreme Being or the Ultimate Reality is triadically presented as the Good or the One, the Intelligence or the One-Many, and the World-Soul or the One and the Many. To these we could also add the triad associated with Comte's philosophy, which talks of the cultus of humanity as the Great Being, of Space as the Great Medium, and of the Earth as the Great Fetish (see

They are "the vital power" that reaches "far beyond the mere contour of the body" (Johnson, 1961:2), "the spoken word" as extension of the one who has spoken (Johnson, 1961:2,3), the "name" of an individual is an extension of his personality (Johnson, 1961:3,4), and the "house or household" as representing the personality of the man at its head (Johnson, 1961:4 -6). Extension of personality understood in this manner allows Johnson to see without difficulty the Spirit (Johnson, 1961:15,16) and the Word (Johnson, 1961:17) as mere extensions of Yahweh's Personality.

Clearly, religious experience, rigorous intellectual reflection and the problem of 'the one and the many' found among different traditional religions, are factors that may commend the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, what makes the doctrine of the Trinity authoritative is the fact that it describes the way God wishes to be known. This description is not just taken from the Christian experience of God. The Scripture clearly depicts God in Trinitarian terms. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus biblical. The idea 'biblical' or 'scriptural' does however not refer only to those words and concepts that are found on the pages of Bible. If we go by this definition of 'biblical', then we might as well conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity is not biblical, since the word Trinity does not appear in the pages of the Bible. This, however, is not the way the Christian faith, right from the time of the patristic writers, has always defined the term 'biblical'. Greene-McCreight explains:

> While it may seem only that the only obvious way to define "biblical" is that which appears on the pages of the Bible, it is apparent that for the orthodox patristic writers, that which counts as "scriptural" and therefore authoritative (the key notion behind the term biblical) encompasses that which is argued, inferred or construed on the basis of the biblical witness read within the guidance of the Rule of Faith (McCreight, 1997:296,297).

The concept of the Trinity is biblical not just because it is "argued, inferred, or construed" from the scriptural witness (see McCreight. 1997:296). Rather, as Heick puts it, the doctrine of the Trinity itself:

> ... is the underlying and governing thought of the biblical history of redemption. In addition, the Trinitarian faith expresses a doctrinal experience of the Church, the necessity of which has been tested by the practical needs of piety through centuries. The problem presented itself unconsciously in the baptismal formula of earliest Christianity (Heick, 1965:143).

Fulton, 1921:458).

If we were to reject the term Trinity just because it does not appear in the pages of the Bible, then we would have to reject a host of other terms as well. An example of a term that falls into this category is *homoousios*. Athanasius obtained *homoousios* from non-biblical sources but, regardless of this, the term has been accepted as scriptural and therefore authoritative even by the critics of the concept of the Trinity on the basis that *homoousios* is "argued, inferred or construed on the basis of the biblical witness" (McCreight, 1997:297). Moreover, translation assumes that if we stick to the principle of dynamic equivalence, we can use the language of non-biblical sources. There is no reason why theology in our time cannot use the language obtained from non-biblical sources to proclaim the truth revealed in the word of God. Like the word *homoousios*, the word Trinity originally came from non-biblical sources; however, it is scriptural and therefore authoritative, as it expresses the truth revealed in the biblical witness.

1.3 The Biblical Revelation of God

1.3.1 Preliminary observation

When we talk of the biblical revelation of God, we are concerned with the way the two Testaments of the Bible indicate the self-revelation of God. We cannot, however, study and develop the Old Testament's picture of God in isolation from the New Testament's, and neither can we legitimately talk of 'this' as the Old Testament's picture of God and the 'other' as the New Testament's. This procedure has been followed for practical and historical reasons by both the Old Testament theology and the New Testament theology. However, the practice is theologically questionable. The Bible as a whole is the normative context of interpreting any one of its parts. To fence off one Testament and make theological statements from it in isolation is to lead to imbalance. Our articulation of theological statements must therefore take into consideration the views of both Testaments of the Bible.[26]

[26] Goldingay has ably explained the nature of the relationship between the OT and the NT in the following terms: "The Old lays the theological foundations for the New and sometimes explicitly looks forward in a hope which the Christian sees confirmed or fulfilled in Christ. The New presupposes this foundation and looks back to Christ, concentrating on what needs to be said in light of his coming, but encouraging rather than discouraging us to do this against the background of OT's broader concerns. Faith in Christ with its background in the NT may provide the pre-understanding for our approach to the OT; but where we find the OT saying something in tension with that pre-understanding, our reaction will be to allow it to broaden the latter, not to accept only what conforms to what we know already. Christ helps us to understand the OT, but the OT helps us to understand Christ." (Goldingay, 1981:34).

Our doctrine of God should therefore not just be the Old Testament's construction and neither should it reject or slighten the Old Testament's construction in favour of a supposedly New Testament position. Rather, it should be a comprehensive presentation of the picture of God seen in both Testaments of the Bible.

1.3.2 The Trinitarian Vestiges in the Old Testament

The Old Testament indicates what is clearly a progressive self-revelation of God. Right from Genesis, early anticipations of the Trinitarian understanding of God are not only evident but, as Carl F Henry has noted, they in fact "... gain increasing clarity in the course of an enlarging scriptural disclosure" (Henry, 1982:195).

1.3.2.1 Us/we Pronouns

A significant rudimentary intimation of the Trinitarian truth appearing in the early part of the Old Testament is the first person plural pronouns *us* and *our* found in Genesis 1:26. The other places where the plural first person *us* is used in reference to God is in the contexts of the expulsion of man from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22), the confusion of human language at Babel (Gen. 11:7), and the call of the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6:8). The Old Testament scholars understand the plural reference in these passages in various ways. KA Mathews has identified at least six ways of understanding the plural reference in these passages: "(1) a remnant of polytheistic myth; (2) God's address to creation, "heavens and earth";[27] (3) a plural indicating divine honor and majesty;[28] (4) self-deliberation;[29] (5) divine address to a

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[27] The elevated nature of the theology of Genesis 1:1-2:3 cannot allow for remnants of polytheism. Verse 27 identifies God alone as the creator, consequently God would have no reason to address heavens and earth.

[28] The honorific plural is debatable since the point of Genesis 1:26, for instance, is not the majesty of God but the unique relationship between God and man (the image of God issue).

[29] Self-deliberation views depict God as someone in contemplation. This view is possible, especially in view of the change to the singular in Genesis 1:27. Other passages, such as Pss 42:5, 11:43:5, clearly have self-deliberation in view. The difficulty, however, is that the plural is never used this way in self-deliberations. Cassuto is of the opinion that the "plural of exhortation" is more likely (see Mathews, 1996:n.175).

heavenly court of angels; [30] and (6) divine dialogue within the Godhead" (Mathews, 1996:161). We see these passages used by the Christian writers to prove the activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit in creation for the first time in the Epistle to Barnabas (5:5; 6:12). Justin Matyr later expressed similar sentiments (*Dial* 62:1). Irenaeus says that God was speaking to his two hands, the Son and the Spirit, when he said, "Let us make man" (*Contr. Omn. Haer.* IV, *Praef.* 4, xx.1; V, i.3, xxviii.4). Of course the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural pronouns in these passages; however, it must be said that a plurality within the unity of Godhead is clearly indicated by these passages.

1.3.2.2 The Angel of Yahweh

The earliest books of the Old Testament also speak of Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh in a way that sees the two as one, yet distinct. In some cases the angel of Yahweh has divine titles and he even receives worship (cf Exod. 23:21). In particular instances, as in the passage just cited, the Old Testament puts 'angel' in the singular, but at other times the Old Testament clearly refers to 'angel' in the plural (see Gen. 18 and 19). The story of Abraham's encounter with the three men at Mamre, for instance, has several oscillations between singular and plural. The story opens with "The Lord (Yahweh) appeared to Abraham" (Gen. 18:1), yet Abraham "saw three men" (Gen. 18:2). He addressed these three men in the singular, "my lord" (Gen. 18:3), although in Gen. 18:4 he continued to speak to them in the plural, "you may all". Interestingly, the mysterious oscillation from singular to plural continues through out the whole story. Although, as Wainwright has noted, the New Testament never used Genesis 18 in its treatment of the Trinitarian nature of God (Wainwright, 1962:28,29), it is difficult to rule out any possibility of some seeds of the doctrine of the Trinity here.[31]

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[30] PD Miller, *Genesis 1-11:Studies in Structure and Theme, JSOTSup 8* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978, 9-26) argues strongly for this view. As far as Miller is concerned, the OT warrants the idea of a heavenly court where plans are made and decisions rendered (see Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; 12:8; 38:7; 1Kgs 22:19-28; Isa 6:1-8; and Jer 23:18). The difficulty with this position is the phrase "our image". Could human beings be said to be created in the image of the angels? Moreover, the theological stance of Genesis 1 is that God has no antecedent partner with whom he could have created the universe, neither does Genesis 1 mention angels.

[31] This position is not new to the Christian scholarship. Wainwright (1962:29) has noted that Ambrose held a Trinitarian explanation of the Genesis 18 passage. The authorities Wainwright cites are: *De Spiritu Sancto,* II,

1.3.2.3 The Salvation Story

The salvation story presents the idea of plurality in the unity of God even more clearly. The whole point of the salvation story, which is a direct concern of about half of the Old Testament (narratives from Genesis to Ezra), and an indirect interest of the other half (much of the prophets, some parts of Psalms wisdom literature, and the prophetic polemics) is to accent the uniqueness of the God of Israel and to bear Israel out as a nation which believes that its God, not gods, controls history (see Goldingay, 1981:77-79). Yahweh alone, believes the Old Testament, is "... freely active in history, can alone legitimately claim the title *El-Lohim*, that all other *Elohim* are not such in reality, are nothings; that this Yahweh is the absolute Sovereign Lord" and that absolutely everything depends on him (Rahner, TI I:93).

Yet this Yahweh is understood by the Old Testament to have a messenger. Prophet Isaiah speaks simultaneously of Yahweh and of his anointed messenger of salvation upon whom is the Spirit of Yahweh (Isa. 61:1f). In the words of Carl FH Henry

> This messenger is revealed step by step as a distinct divine personality being variously designated as the Word, the Wisdom and the Son of God. While he is said to be "of old," the Mighty God, the Adonai, the Lord of David, Jehovah our righteousness, yet he is to be born of a virgin and to bear the sins of many (Henry, 1982:197).

1.3.2.4 Hypostases of Yahweh

The Old Testament also refers the hypostases *pneuma, sophia* and *logos* to God. These hypostases are presented not as independent beings, but as personal realities whose existence is in away integrated with that of Yahweh (Henry, 1982:197 cf Wainwright, 1962:29-40).

1.3.2.4.1 The Spirit

The Old Testament views the Spirit as a person and therefore suggests that he can be grieved

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Intro.4; *De Excessu fratris Satyri,* II, 96 cf *De Fide,* I, xiii.80; *De Officiis Ministrorum,* II, xxi.16. Augustine, Ambrose's student, held a clearer Trinitarian view of the Genesis 18 text. As far as Augustine is concerned, all

(Isa. 63:10), but also that he guides people and instructs them in the ways of Yahweh (Psa. 143:10, Neh. 9:20). Although the Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *ruah*, which is translated "wind" or "breath" and which later Judaism would regard as "light", "fire", "sound" or "object which has weight" (see Davies, 1970:183-185), it is obvious that the qualities the Old Testament attaches to *ruah* do not, as a matter, of fact belong to wind, breath, light, fire, sound or solid bodies. Moreover, the emphasis of the Old Testament's understanding of *ruah* is clearly not on materiality, but is rather on the quality of *ruah* as "... power, vitality, activity or life" (Davies, 1970:183). The Old Testament views this Spirit as generating from Yahweh and as belonging to Yahweh (Judges 13:25; Isa. 32:15; 42:1; 59:21). In some cases the Old Testament goes as far as identifying the Spirit with Yahweh (Psalm 139:7). According to Wainwright, the occurance of Spirit in Psalm 139:7 is "... equivalent to the Presence, which was a term used as a circumlocution for God" (Wainwright, 1962:30). In fact, other Old Testament texts separate the Spirit from God, although they closely link him with God as his power, his breath which gives life, guides and drives to action (see Ezek. 37:9; Judges 3:10). The fact that the Old Testament identifies the Spirit with Yahweh, while at the same time suggesting that the two are indeed distinct entities, is a point worth noting.

1.3.2.4.2 Wisdom

The Old Testament also identifies Yahweh, the Deliverer of his people, with Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom 7:25ff. says the following regarding the relationship of Wisdom to God:

> For she is breath of the power of God,
> And a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty;
> Therefore can nothing be defiled find entrance into her.
> For she is an effulgence from everlasting light,
> And an unspotted mirror of the working of God,
> And an image of his goodness.

According to the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom was brought forth by God (Prov. 8:22ff.). But the Old Testament does not only see Wisdom as having her origin in God, but it sees her also as separate and distinct from God. It is on account of this that Proverbs 8:30 can talk of Wisdom being the craftsman at the side of God. During the last four centuries before Christ,

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three persons of the Trinity appeared to Abraham (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, III, 25).

the Jews began to see God as transcendent and Wisdom as the explanation for God's activity in the world. Thus Sirach says the following of Wisdom: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of abyss" (Sir. 24:3ff). Elsewhere, Wisdom is depicted as having been there from the beginning (Sir. 24:9), standing in a close relationship to God (Wis. 8:3), an "initiate in the knowledge of God, and as an associate in his works" (Wis. 8:4). It is no wonder that the term Wisdom was taken over by the Christian thinkers as a suitable term for explaining both the nature of Christ and the relationship of Christ to God.

1.3.2.4.3 The Word

The Old Testament views the Word of the Lord as an agent for accomplishing the will of Yahweh, thus Psalm 33:6 can say: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made". This view of the Word enables the Old Testament to ascribe a more or less independent existence to the Word. Isaiah 55:11, for example, reports Yahweh as saying: "... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it". Psalm 29 views "the voice" of the Lord in much the same way.

Whereas the Old Testament generally ascribed independent existence to the Word, the Targums[32] sometimes substituted the divine name with the expression "the Word (*Memra*)" and therefore tended to see *Memra* more as a surrogate for the divine name Yahweh (Albright, 1966:45). An example of such a case is Exodus 19:17. Morris has observed that our Bible renders this verse as: "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God" but the Targum, on the other hand, reads "to meet the Word of God" (Morris,

[32] Targum was a custom of giving a running translation of the Hebrew Scripture in contexts where the Scripture was still read in Hebrew, although the language had long ceased to be a spoken language. At first, the Targums were only oral, but later they were written down. Since they were running translations, they gave the sense of the text being read and not of mechanical translation. At the time of the Targums, the Jews had ceased to pronounce the divine name Yahweh because of reverence and fear of breaking the third commandment. On account of this, the Targums avoided the name Yahweh and instead substituted expressions they thought were more appropriate (see Morris, 1971:119).

1971:119). Some Targums have as many as 320 cases where the divine name has been replaced with "the Word"[33].

The Hebrew concept of *Memra* raises two issues. Philo saw Logos[34] as "a second God" and at other times the concept meant for him "one God in action" (Morris, 1971:121). However, without going into much discussion we can conclude, in agreement with William Temple, that the Logos

> ... alike for Jew and Gentile represents the ruling fact of the universe, and represents that fact as the self-expression of God. The Jew will remember that 'by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made', the Greek will think of the rational principle of which all natural laws are particular expressions. Both will agree that this Logos is the starting point of all things (Temple, 1939:4). [35]

This Logos, who is "the starting point of all things", is on the one hand a designation of the Divine, but on the other hand Logos is distinguished from the divine, as is evident in such texts as Isa. 55:11; Psa. 33:6; and Psa. 29. The significance of these observations lies in the fact that the Old Testament's *Memra* allows us to see plurality in the One Godhead: There is God and "a second God" (see Morris, 1971:121).

1.3.3 The Trinitarian Testimonies in the New Testament

1.3.3.1 The Jewish idea of Yahweh as normative

The New Testament accepts the Old Testament's understanding of God, and does not raise either the question of God's existence or that of the 'one' and the 'many'. It knows the God it testifies about as the God understood in Old Testament terms. Thus the New Testament believes that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is the God who entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, his chosen people, and is the saviour that the

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[33] A case in point here is the Targum of Jonathan. Morris has noted that this particular Targum is on the books in our Bible from Joshua to II Kings (excluding Ruth) and all the prophetical books (excluding Daniel). In this Targum alone, the divine name is substituted about 320 times by "the Word" (see Morris, 1971:120).

[34] Philo used the term Logos about 1,300 times (see WF Howard, *Christianity According to St John*, London, 1943:36ff.).

[35] Several New Testament scholars are of the opinion that John's Logos owes both to Greek and Hebrew sources. Notable examples of such scholars are MacGregor, BH Streeter, and FW Gingrich (see details of discussion in Morris, 1971:note 149).

nations need, and that the saviour is none other than Yahweh himself. The New Testament therefore takes the Old Testament's concept of Yahweh, viewed within the perplexity of the 'one' and the 'many', as its normative yet unspoken theological background and the context of its own reconstruction of the doctrine of God. In a sense the picture of God in the New Testament is the same as the picture of God in the Old Testament, except that the occurrence of the Divine 'plurality' in the former is heightened, intensified and clarified. The New Testament is therefore not introducing a new and a different understanding of God[36], it rather sees itself as performing the necessary and essential task of sharpening the biblical (in this case the Old Testament's) picture of God for the community of faith. In the words of Berkhof, the coming of God to man we see in the Old Testament is in the New Testament "immeasurably intensified, and thereby given a completion as well: he comes to men in a man, in one who as 'the Son' stands in a unique relationship to him as 'the Father'" (Berkhof, 1979:19,20).

1.3.3.2 One God and Father

The New Testament regards God as One and that this one God is the Father of Jesus Christ. The New Testament passages that describe God as one are Mark 10:18; 12:29; Matt. 23:9; Jn. 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 3:30; I Cor. 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; Eph 4:6; I Tim. 1:17; 2:5; Jas. 2:19; 4:12; and Jude 25. Whereas these passages talk of God as One, Wainwright has noted that

> ... in eight out of these fifteen passages (Mark 10:18; Matt. 23:9; I Cor 8:6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; I Tim 2:5; Jude 25; John 17:3) God is explicitly distinguished from Jesus Christ. In three of the passages (Matt.23:9; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6) and also in the context of John 17:3, God is called Father (Wainwright, 1962:42).

Although the idea of God as Father is not limited to the Hebrew - Christian tradition, the idea of the Fatherhood of God found in the New Testament is derived from Hebrew thought[37].

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[36] John Bright assumes that the New Testament provides a criterion of distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable aspects of the Old Testament (Bright, 1967:200, 211- 212). John Goldingay believes, however, that "... the New Testament leans, if at all, the opposite way: the question was not whether the OT was Christian but whether the NT was biblical. In reaction to this approach Arnold van Ruler speaks of the OT as the real Bible and the NT being its explanatory glossary"(Goldingay, 1981: 34).

[37] In the Near Eastern culture, fatherhood is a metaphor of grace, tenderness, care, responsibility for the growth of a new family as well as motherly compassion. According to Terrein, the Old Testament prophets and

The title is used in connection with creation (Isa. 64:8), the election of Israel as a nation (Jer. 31:9; Mal. 2:10; Isa. 1:2; 30:1; 45:11; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 11:1 and Exod. 4:22), and the anointed king (2 Sam. 7:14; Psa. 2:7; 89:27). In the Gospels, Jesus generally referred to God as the Father. Four of these occurrences are in the Gospel of Mark, eight are in the material common to Luke and Matthew, seven are in the material peculiar to Luke and twenty two in the material peculiar to Matthew (Wainwright, 1962:44). The title is rather frequent in the Johannine writings. In these citations, Jesus referred to God using the Aramaic word *abbā*,[38] meaning "my Father". There is no evidence in the pre-Christian Palestinian Judaism that an individual Jew ever addressed God as abbā as this implied too great a familiarity. Wainwright has therefore rightly argued that "when Jesus used *abba* of God he was making a startling innovation. He was claiming a relationship with God which was closer than that which was claimed by any of his countrymen. He was claiming a unique kind of sonship" (Wainwright, 1962:45).

It is thus clear from the New Testament's evidence that the New Testament puts emphasis on God as the Father of Jesus Christ. This emphasis viewed in the context of other statements in which the divinity of the Son is affirmed or implied allowed the Christians to see the Father-Son relationship and therefore a plurality within the Godhead. The Christians, as we see in the Pauline corpus, viewed God as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor.1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3). Although the Christians understood that by the term *abbā* Jesus claimed a unique sonship, they took the liberty and used the term in their prayers.

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psalmists did not address God as 'Mother' because that would not distinguish Yahweh from Mother Goddess (Terrein quoted in Louw, 1998:85). Schrenk, discussing the title "Father" in the TWNT, V, has been able to clearly explain that the idea of the Fatherhood of God is found in many ancient religions. (1) The early Indian religion regard Dyaus or Heaven as Father. (2) The Greeks addressed Zeus as "Father Zeus". (3) Osiris was said to be the father of Horus. (4) Later Greek philosophy referred to God as the Father of men (see the Stoic Epictetus) and the Father of Cosmos (see the later Platonists Numenius and Porphyry) (Schrenk, TWNT, V, pp. 951-956). (5) Plato's *Republic* also allows us to see the title "Father" as connected to that which he believed to be the absolute reality, namely the Idea of the Good, while his *Timaeus* assigns the title "Father" to the Demiurge (see Rep.VI.506e and Tim.41a).

[38] Scholars suggest at least two ways the New Testament uses the Aramaic *abbā* as an address to God. In passages like Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15, Matt 11:16, Lk 10:21, Mk 5:41 and 14:36, *abbā* is used in a determinative sense as in the Greek ὁ πατηρ (the father). In these citations, *abbā* suggests the determinative form of *ab* (father). The second usage, the vocative, has generated much debate. Wainwright, for example, argues that the citation in Mk 14:36 indicates that *abbā* is derived from children's baby talk ('daddy', papa'). J Jeremias initially understood *abbā* in this sense; he later abandoned that line of thought and referred to it as "a piece of inadmissible naivety" (Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, London, 1967:63). The other scholars who understand *abbā* in the sense described by Wainwright are JGD Dunn (*Jesus and the Spirit*, London, 1975:21-26;

Thus for the Christians, God was related to Jesus in a unique way, but he was also "our Father" (see I Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:4; etc.).

1.3.3.3 Jesus Christ as Divine

The New Testament does not see itself as having fabricated the idea that Christ is God, rather it sees the idea as having its roots in the text of the Old Testament. Already we have seen what the Jews thought of "Wisdom" and "Word". It is no wonder that the Christian thought would apply these titles to Christ. The other Old Testament themes that are equally important in understanding the Old Testament's roots of the divinity of Christ are "Lord" (the one who has dominion over the created universe), "Son of God" (he who is divine and has familial relationship with the Father), "Son of Man" (he who comes to save, serve and judge mankind), "Christ" or "the Anointed one" (the one anointed to rule over men) and "High Priest" (he who appears before God to make intercessions for men). These expressions and other New Testament terms such as ηικον of God and απαγασμα of God explicitly or implicitly occur in several places in the New Testament (see Kaiser, 1982:29-41).

The titles and the terms are to be viewed as illustrations of the New Testament's position on the identity of Christ and not as proof 'expressions'. They identify Christ with Yahweh, the God of Israel, but without confusing the two. Let us look at the use of "Lord" as an example. The New Testament does not only call Jesus Lord, but it also transfers to Jesus ideas and quotations which originally referred to Yahweh (see Mark 12:35-37 cf Psa. 110:1; Mat. 7:21; Lk. 6:46; Acts 2:21 cf Joel 2:32 and Rom.10:13; 7:59,60; I Cor. 11:23; 16:22b; Phil. 2:5-11 cf Isa. 45:23; Eph. 4:8 cf Psa.68:18; Jn. 12:40,41 cf Isa. 6:10). Although the Scripture uses the term Lord in reference to Jesus, it seems to be fonder of the term 'Son'. Apparently the idea of the 'Son' gives the best account of the nature of interaction within the Godhead. The Father-Son relationship does three significant things: First of all it expresses how both Father and Son were God; secondly, it expresses the logical priority of the Father without detracting from the divinity of the Son; and finally, it best accounts for the unity of the two persons (Kaiser, 1982:41).

Christology in the making, London, 1980:22-23) and MJ Borg (*Jesus: A New Vision*, San Francisco, 1987:45).

The New Testament texts that expressly call Jesus God are Rom. 9:5, Jn. 1:1, 18, 20:28, IJn. 5:20, Tit. 2:11ff., Heb.1.8 and 2Pet. 1.1. What follows are some brief comments on Rom. 9:5, Jn. 1:1, 18, 20:18 and Tit. 2:11ff. The grammar of Rom. 9:5 indicates that Christ is clearly called God. Scott and Kirk argue that Paul could not have identified Christ with God, since to do so would compromise Paul's thought, which is deeply rooted in his character and his strict Jewish background[39]. It is difficult to join the likes of Scott and Kirk on this score. The context of Rom. 9:5 indicates that Paul contemplated the rejection of Christ by the Jews. This thought, explains Wainwright, led him to come out openly on what he perceived to be the actual identity of Christ; namely that he was θεος (God) and ηυλογετος (blessed) (Wainwright, 1962:54-58). Again there is no doubt that John the evangelist intended right from the beginning of the Fourth Gospel to identify Christ with God. The Fourth Gospel begins with a declaration of the divinity of Christ (Jn. 1:1 and 1:18) and ends with the confession of the divinity of Christ (Jn. 20:28).

The study of the Pastoral Epistles yields at least two reasons in Paul's letter to Titus (2:11-13) why Christ should be called God. (1) The Pastoral Epistles call both God and Christ Saviour (see 1 Tim. 1:1, 15; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:8-10; 4:10; Tit. 1:3, 2:11-13, 3:4-7). If the title Saviour is given as freely to Christ as it is to God in these Epistles, then there is simply no reason one would find it strange if the same epistles called Christ God. (2) The Phrase "Great God" does not occur for the first time in Titus 2:13; this expression is used of God in the Septuagint (eg. Deut.10:17; Psa. 85:10; Isa. 26:4; Jer. 39:19; and Dan. 2:45). The fact that it is used of Christ in Titus indicates that at some point the Christians transferred this term to Christ.

The other New Testament passages that explicitly call Christ God are 2 Thes. 1:12; Col. 2:2; Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20; Jas. 1:1; Mat. 1:23; and 1 Tim. 1:17. The texts in which Christ is explicitly called God, explains Rahner, are "... vastly outnumbered by the other texts in which the New Testament intends to express Christ's divine nature in one way or another and yet does not make use of the word [theos]" (Rahner, TI; I:137). Passages that call Christ God in an indirect way are those that refer to Jesus as the Son of God, those that use the title Lord

[39] See Anderson Scott's *Christianity according to St Paul, p.274* and KE Kirk's *Romans,* pp. 103-104.

in reference to Jesus, those that indicate the worship of Jesus, those that draw the connection between Jesus and Judgment, those that link Jesus to the origin and the sustenance of Creation, and those that describe Jesus as Saviour.

The evidence of the New Testament is that Jesus is known as "God over all" (Rom. 9:5), as judge and creator (Col. 1:16; 1 Thes. 5:2ff; 2 Thes. 2:1-12), as the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), and as Lord in the same way that God is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). However, although the New Testament does not hesitate to call Jesus Lord and to transfer to him ideas and quotations that were originally reserved for Yahweh, it must be noted that it also puts adequate distance between the Father and Christ (see greetings of Pauline letters; I Cor. 8:5,6; Eph. 4:5,6; Jn. 20:28). It is clear from this way of speaking of the Son and the Father that the New Testament authors were aware of the plurality in the Godhead, and that they sought to preserve the divinity of the Father without demeaning the identity of the Son.

1.3.3.4 The Holy Spirit as Divine

The Holy Spirit, according to the scriptural revelation, is also called the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ (see Rom. 8:9ff.). The New Testament does not introduce his work for the first time, rather it is already known in Israel by the time of the New Testament. Judges, kings, and prophets are known to have been endowed with the Spirit of God. The Messiah, according to the Old Testament, will receive the Spirit of God (Isa.11:2), the Spirit of God brings about the covenant, and this Spirit will dominate the end time (Joel 2:28). The New Testament nowhere seeks to prove either the existence or the deity of the Holy Spirit. It proceeds from the understanding that the Old Testament teaches the divinity of the Holy Spirit and that what is said about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament has either been fulfilled or is about to be fulfilled.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament sees the Spirit as a person (Isa. 63:10; Psa. 143:10, Neh. 9:20). The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *ruah*, which is translated as "wind" or "breath" and which later Judaism would regard as "light", "fire", "sound" or "object which has weight" (see Davies, 1970:183-185). It is obvious, however, that the qualities the Old Testament attaches to *ruah* do not as a matter of fact belong to wind, breath,

light, fire, sound or solid bodies. Moreover, the emphasis of the Old Testament's understanding of *ruah* is clearly not materiality, rather it is the quality of *ruah* as "... power, vitality, activity or life" (Davies, 1970:183). It is on account of this that the New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as a person. Since he is a person, he is called Comforter (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; and 1 Jn. 5:6). He speaks (Mark 13:11; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; and 28:25), forbids (Acts 16:6), thinks good (Acts 15:28), appoints (Acts 20:28), sends (Acts 13:4) and bears witness (Acts 5:32; 20:23; Rom. 8:16). He prevents (Acts 16:7), cries (Rom. 8:26), leads (Rom. 8:14), and makes intercession (Rom. 8:26). He is also depicted as capable of being deceived (Acts 5:3), tempted (Acts 5:9), resisted (Acts 7:51; 6:10) and grieved (Eph. 4:30).

The New Testament also identifies the Spirit with God in the same way as seen in the Old Testament (see Judges 13:25; Isa. 32:15; 42:1; 59:21; Psa. 139:7). Apostle John depicts the Holy Spirit as performing a unique function of God, viz the function of judgment (Jn. 16:8-11). Paul, in his letter to the Romans, does not only view the Spirit as generating from the Father, but he also views the Spirit as belonging to the Father (see Rom. 8:9ff). The other reference in which the Spirit is identified with God is 2 Cor. 3:17-18. The context of this text is Ex. 34:34, which talks of Moses entering the Lord's presence (see 2 Cor. 3:16). There is no doubt that Paul clearly identifies the Spirit with Yahweh in the passage of 2 Cor. 3:17-18. While these examples adequately illustrate the fact that the New Testament identifies the Holy Spirit with Yahweh, it is important to note that the New Testament indicates that the Holy Spirit could be worshipped directly (see Phil. 3:3). The crucial phrase here is οι πνευματι θεου λατευοντες, which could be translated "... who worship by the Spirit of God" (NIV) or "who worship the Spirit of God". The grammar of the text (Phil. 3:3) in the original could allow for the second reading since, as Wainwright argues, the verb λατευω is followed by an object in the dative case -- πνευματι θεου, thus the verse is evidence for the practice of the worship of the Spirit (Wainwright, 1962:228)[40].

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[40] Wainwright himself sees this reading as a possibility. He recognises that Augustine held this interpretation, and he argues that there is clear evidence for worship not just through the Spirit but also to the Spirit. According to Wainwright, the Holy Spirit was "... worshipped in conjunction with Father and Son" (Wainwright, 1962:228).

While these passages and references identify the Spirit with the Father, other occurrences in fact separate the Spirit from the Father. A case in point is 1Cor. 6:19-20. In verse 19 of this text, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit "... who is in you, whom you have received from God". The Holy Spirit here is seen as he who is given and God as the giver. The other places where the New Testament obviously distances the Holy Spirit from the Father are those in which the Spirit is depicted as speaking, forbidding, appointing, being grieved and so on. Occurrences such as these speak of an agent who, though divine as seen from other Old and New Testament passages, is also adequately distanced from the Father. The point clearly made by this distinction is that there is plurality in the Godhead and that the Scripture, both the New and the Old Testament, does not confuse the Father and the Spirit.

The New Testament does not only speak of the Spirit in a manner that identifies him with the Father while at the same time putting adequate distance between the two, it also speaks of the relationship of the Son and the Spirit in a similar fashion. Again the New Testament is not introducing anything new here; already in the Old Testament the 'One Coming' and the Holy Spirit are linked, and this is done in such a way that the two are not confused (see Isa. 11:2; 42:1; and 61:2). John the Baptist carried the link into the New Testament and spoke of two distinct divine agents; viz the Spirit and the 'One Coming' (Mark 1:8; Matt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16). The 'One Coming' himself, namely Christ, also saw a link between himself and the Spirit. The following passages quote Jesus as speaking about the Holy Spirit: Mark 3:29 cf Matt. 12:31 and Lk. 12:10; Mark 13:11 cf Lk. 12:12, 21:15; Lk. 11:13; Lk. 4:18 cf Isa. 61; and Mark 12:36 cf Matt. 22:43, Psa. 110:1.

The way in which Jesus testifies about the Holy Spirit in these passages indicates clearly that he has put a reasonable distance between himself and the Holy Spirit, while at the same time he has brought to surface the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. The apostles, notably Paul, see a close relationship between Christ and the Spirit (see the texts 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:9ff. and the phrases "in Christ" and "in Spirit"). However, what Paul is saying in these references must be seen in the context of the correlation between the Spirit and Christ already taught in

the Gospels[41]. Thornton has explained the thinking of the apostles on this issue in the following words:

> In St Paul's teaching the parallelism and identification between Christ and His Spirit are so close, that by looking at this side only we might suppose them to be simply identical in all respects, and so conclude that the Two must be taken to be One. If, however, we note the marked differences of Pauline language in describing the functions respectively of Christ and His Spirit, and if we then turn to the teachings of St John about the Paraclete, it will become clear that this simple identification cannot stand. The identification is best understood as that of a mutual interpenetration with divergence of functions (Thornton quoted in Wainwright, 1962:220).

Perhaps important for our purposes here is also the way the New Testament introduces the triad -- God the Father, Christ and the Spirit. Some of the New Testament passages which concretely situate the Holy Spirit in the context of the Father and the Son, and therefore make an explicit statement about the divinity of the Holy Spirit, are Mat.28:19, Lk. 24:49, Jn. 14:16, 17; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-15, Act. 2:32-33; 38-39; 5:31-32; 7:55-56; 10:38; 11:15-17, Rom. 5:1-5; 8:9- 11; 14-17; 14:17-18; 15:15-16; 15:30, ICor.2:6-16; 6:11; 6:15-20; 12:3; 12:4-6, IICor.1:21-22; 13:13, Gal. 4:4-6, Eph.1:3-14; 1:17; 2:18-22; 3:14-19; 4:4-6; 5:15-20, IIThes.2:13, Tit.3:4-11, Heb.2:2-4; 10:29-31, IPet.1:1-2; 2:4-5; 4:14, IJn.3:23-24; 4:11-16; 5:5-8, and Jud.20-21. The New Testament does not just view these associations as formal; this certainly is one of the ways in which the New Testament seeks to state the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The divinity of the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in Acts 28:25, where Paul emphasises to the Jews in Rome that the One who revealed the divine warning to prophet Isaiah against the spiritual callousness of the Hebrews was none other than the Spirit.

1.4 Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity, as we have noticed, is a teaching that is deeply rooted in the Bible. The Old Testament has such Trinitarian vestiges as the first person plural pronouns, the Angel of Yahweh, the salvation story, and the hypostaseis of Yahweh. The New

[41] The Synoptic Gospels present Christ as having been conceived of the Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk.12: 10) and closely links the Spirit with Christ (see Mark 3:29ff.). John also emphasises the correlation between Christ and the Spirit (see 1Jn. 2:1; Jn. 14:16). Paul, as Stauffer notes, leaves no doubt that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all "linked in an indissoluble threefold relation" (see Ethelbert Stauffer, *Theos: The* Uniqueness of God", TDNT, 3:107ff.).

Testament, on the other hand, is more explicit on Trinitarianism. In it we find clear evidence of One God worshipped in Three Persons. Yahweh of Israel is depicted as one God and the Father of Jesus Christ. Christ is described as Lord, Son of God, and Son of Man, the Anointed One and High Priest. The Holy Spirit is described not only as generating from the Father, but he is also identified with and distanced from both the Father and the Son. Whenever the New Testament describes Christ and the Holy Spirit as of the same Divine nature as the Father, the indication is that the idea is not a New Testament innovation, but rather that it has its roots in the Old Testament. The fundamental issue therefore is not whether the doctrine of the Trinity is scriptural. We have demonstrated in this chapter that the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact scriptural. What we see as a major stumbling block is whether we are prepared to accept the authority of the Scripture.[42]

[42] According to DJ Louw, the Bible is authoritative because God is its author. "Since God is the constitutive factor, neither the message nor the scope of the Bible determines its authority: its authority is determined by the faithfulness of God" (Louw, 1998:376). Because God is the author of the Bible, the Bible must thus be accepted as an objective source of Christian theology. For studies on authority, see: in philosophy, Arendt H, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* [I/17] and in theology: liberal Protestantism, Ogden S, "The Authority of Scripture for Theology" *Interpretation* 30,243-61; in Catholic theology see Congar Y, "The Historical Development of Authority in the Church: Points for Christian Reflection" in *Problems of Authority,* ed. Todd (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962), pp 119-55, and for different models of authority, see the analysis of Cameron JM *Images of Authority (*London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

2 The Emergence of the Doctrine of Immanent Trinity

2.1 Introduction

What this chapter seeks to explore is the reaction of the early Church to the biblical testimony on God and the significance of that reaction to the Christian faith. Perhaps the best place to begin this task is by quoting St Augustine extensively on what he understood as the position of the Church Fathers who preceded him on the doctrine of God. His book, *De Trinitate*, I, iv, 7 reads as follows:

> All those Catholic expounders of the divine Scriptures, both Old and New, whom I have been able to read, who have written before me concerning the Trinity, Who is God, have purposed to teach, according to the Scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God: Although the Father hath begotten the Son, and so he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity. Yet not that this Trinity was born of the virgin Mary, and crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended to heaven but only the Son. Nor again that this Trinity descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus when he was baptized; nor that on the day of Pentecost, after the ascension of the Lord, "when there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind", the same Trinity "sat upon each of them with cloven tongues like as of fire", but only the Holy Spirit. Nor that this Trinity said from heaven, "Thou art my Son", whether when he was baptized by John, or when the voice sounded, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again;" but that it was a word of the Father only, spoken to the Son; although the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as they are indivisible so work indivisibly. This is also my faith, since it is the Catholic faith (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I, iv, 7).

As far as Augustine is concerned, the statement given above is his faith as it is also the Catholic faith, and moreover for him, as it was for the Ante-Nicene and the Nicene Fathers, this is also the starting-point of faith; *initium fidei* (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I, i, 1). The Fathers began by believing the truth that the personal coming of God to man in the Old Testament had been realised in the incarnation of the Son and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Believing this basic truth, they then proceeded to understand its full sweep. The Fathers saw this truth in the Old and the New Testaments. However, they wished to access it not via the anthropomorphisms of the Judaism of the time but via the idea of 'substance', which was in vogue in the Greaco-Roman context of the time and which they redefined to

express the concept of the 'numerical unity' of the Divine essence in distinction from the 'specific unity'.[43] (see Shedd's annotation of *De Trinitate*, I, iv, 7 in Schaff, 1956:20). The principle of the 'numerical unity' allowed the Fathers to articulate, for the Greaco-Roman situation, both the Old Testament's ideas of monotheism and the New Testament's position that this same Yahweh of the Old Testament faith has revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

2.2 The Problem of the 'Third Race'

The problem of how to talk of the 'one' and the 'many' in God was a major theological concern of the early Church, but behind this concern we can also see the mainstream Christianity struggling with the question of its own identity. The same Fathers who are involved in the Trinity debate are also involved with the identity question. Justin, Tertullian, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine are all aware that they are not Jews and the way they wish to explain the God they worship differs significantly from the perspective the Jews hold. They also knew that they were Greaco-Romans and they used the infrastructures of that culture to express their belief in the God that they had come to know in Christ. Although the infrastructure of their culture was so important to them, they also maintained that they were not of the Greaco-Roman world, as the God they knew and worshipped was not θεος, as conceived by the Greek thought, but Yahweh.

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70 and the quelled Jewish revolt of AD 135 led by Simon Bar Kochba against the Roman power forced Judaism and Judaeo-Christianity to begin to talk about their identities openly (Bediako, 1992:34). When Judaeo-Christianity got its independence from Judaism, what later became the mainstream Christianity found Judaeo-Christianity lacking in the necessary intellectual infrastructure as well as the form of faith that the former wanted to identify with. The mainstream Christianity therefore did not feel at home within the Judaeo-Christianity, and so its search for identity continued.

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[43] According to Shedd, 'numerical unity' is distinct from 'specific unity'. The latter refers to the kind of unity in mankind. "In this case there is division of substance -- part after part of the specific nature being separated and formed, by propagation into individuals. No human individual contains the whole of the specific nature. But in the case of the numerical unity of Trinity, there is no division of essence. The whole of the Divine nature is in each divine person" (Shedd in Schaff, 1956:20)

There are two distinct aspects of the concept of Judaeo-Christianity that are worth bringing to attention. On the one hand, the concept of Judaeo-Christianity represents a complex of heresies arising out of Judaism but claiming Christian identity, and on the other hand there is the Judaeo-Christianity conceived as a "cultural form" (Lonergan, 1976:18). As a "cultural form" Judaeo-Christianity is a whole new system of operation "... with its own particular type of imagination, its own strange manner of conception and mode of speech" (ibid.:19). And so, in a way, the Judaeo-Christian heresies were not only preceded by the cultural form of Judaeo-Christianity, but that cultural form also provided the heresies with the necessary intellectual infrastructures. Some of the well known heresies falling under Judaeo-Christianity are the Ebionites (Jesus is the greatest prophet but not the son of God), Elkasites (a simple prophet who had many reincarnations), Christian Zealotism (Jesus is an ordinary man, he had nothing to do with the creation of the world as that was done by angels), Samarito-Christian Gnosis, Sethians and Ophites as well as the Carpocrates (these groups agree on the conception that Jesus was just the son of Joseph and was not in any way different from other men)(see Danielou,1964:55- 85). Given the nature of these sects and the theological positions they advanced, it is obvious that mainstream Christianity had to find a way of distinguishing itself.

Apart from breaking with Judaism and later on with Judaeo-Christianity, the entrance of the mainstream Christianity into the Hellenistic world also introduced its own dynamics. The Christian faith soon found itself in a situation where some of the elements of Greek thought it used in explaining the biblical picture of God heavily influenced the manner in which the faith understood and spoke about God. Some of the Greek concepts which the mainstream Christianity used in the task of formulating the doctrine of God for the Hellenistic context, are those that connect *θεος* with the Greek concepts of τιθεμι, θεος, *θεορεω* or θεαμαι. The other Greek concepts used in this regard and which influenced the way in which the mainstream Christianity understood and spoke about God are the transcendence of θεος, indivisibility of θεος, the idea of the 'Spirit' and the problem of form (see Prestige, 1952:1 - 24).

The use of these Greek ways of understanding θεος in some way facilitated the rise of the Christian heterodox groups such as Gnosticism,[44] Adoptionism,[45] Patripassianism,[46] Sabellianism or Modalistic monarchianism,[47] Subordinationism,[48] Arianism[49] and Marcionism.[50] Once again the Church found itself in a situation which required that it distanced itself from the Greek theism as well as from these Christian sects that were born within that framework of the Greek understanding of θεος.

The Fathers did not find strange the need to distance themselves from both Judaism and Judaeo-Christianity on the one hand and from Hellenism and the Greaco-Roman forms of Christianity on the other hand. Already in the New Testament writings, the identity of Christianity as a 'race, a nation, a people' is evident (see 1Pet.2:9). Peter preferred to use 'a race, a nation, a people' in his reference to the Christians. Paul, on the other hand, talks of 'the Jews, the Greeks, and the community of faith' (see 1Cor. 10:32 cf Jn.4:21ff.). By the time of the Fathers, this triple division on the basis of religion and worship had received acceptance as the basis for developing a distinct Christian self-consciousness in the Greaco-Roman context (Bediako, 1992:36). The triple distinction -- Greeks, Jews and Christians-- is already available in the anonymous writing, *The Preaching of Peter*, which dates from the early second century AD, the epistle *To Diognetus*, which also belongs to the early part of the second-century AD, and in the *Apology* of Aristides addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius. Bediako has noted from these three documents of the early Christian apologetics

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[44] Gnosticism is the idea that God the Creator and the true God are not and cannot be the same.

[45] Adoptionism is the idea that God adopted the man Jesus as Son. He never was God from the beginning. One very vocal theologian who advocated adoptionism is Paul of Samosata.

[46] The argument of this position is that if the Son is God he must be identical with the Father. Praxeas has traditionally been identified with this position.

[47] This view sees God as a monad with three successive modes of existence; Noetus and Sabellius are good examples in this category.

[48] Subordinationism sees the Son as subordinate to the Father and therefore he cannot be divine in the same sense as the Father; some well known surbordinationists are Arius, Origen, and Eusebius.

[49] Arianism is the notion that the Father alone is ingenerate. The Son, according to this view, was created at a point in time and therefore is *heteroousios*; Arius himself propagated this line of thought.

[50] Marcionism is the view that the Creator God of the Jewish religion is incompatible with the God revealed in Christ.

> ... that by the middle of the second century AD, the understanding of the Christian faith as "the new. ... third way" of religious apprehension and manner of worship was of considerable influence in Christian centres of thought. Consequently, the triad of the Greeks (Gentiles), Jews and Christians seems to have become "the Church's basal conception of history" (ibid.:38,39).

It is clear from these developments that right from the time of the Apostles the Christians had consistently looked for their own identity. The formulation of the doctrine of God in Trinitarian terms serves in part as a statement of the identity of the Christian faith in the context of the triad. The mainstream Christian faith based on the doctrine of the Trinity wished to make it clear to Judaism, to Judaeo-Christianity, to Hellenism and to the various forms of Greaco-Roman Christianity that it was different and that it wished to formulate the doctrine of God within the provisions of the Christian faith.

2.3 Monotheism

2.3.1 The Christian and the Talmudic tradition know Christianity as Monotheistic

The early Church confessed belief in one God (see McKim, 1988:5,6). Such a strong identity with the *shema* (Deut.6:4) was inevitable, since the early church began in a Jewish environment, had the chief propagators and many converts from Judaism, took the Scriptures of Judaism and saw its own writings as presupposing that foundation, and viewed itself as a Jewish sect. The Apostle Paul in 1Cor 8:5,6 gives what has been considered a paraphrase of the Jewish *Shema* which he himself as Jew must have recited twice a day:

> "For even if there are so called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom all things come and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1Cor 8:5,6; NIV).

In these verses, Paul splits the *Shema* between the Father and the Son not only in an unprecedented way, but also in a way that seems so natural to him. As far as Paul is concerned, the Father is Lord and the Son is Lord and yet not two Lords.

It is not just the Christian faith that saw itself as monotheistic, the Rabbinic thought of the second century also viewed Christianity as monotheist (see Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*; chapter 10 - chapter 19; chapter 55 - chapter 63). The issue, which Justin raised to

Trypho in the texts cited above, was the existence of ητερος θεος (Dial.55.1). Skarsaune has summarised the thesis of Justin's argument in the following words: "Christ, not the Father, was the one who appeared in the theophanies of the Old Testament, and that he is to be identified with God's Wisdom, who is spoken of in the Bible as a second divine person, begotten by God, but not separated from him" (Skarsaune, 1957:357; see *Dial.* 56-62, 126-129). In response to this thesis, Trypho does not say that that particular position destroys the Christian claim to monotheism, in fact Typho already believes that the Scripture may know a ητερος θεος (Skarsaune, 1957:362). Instead, Trypho is portrayed as commending the Christians for retaining the fundamental part of the Torah, namely the one against idolatry. In *Dialogue* 18.3-19.1, Justin argues that the Christians' readiness for martyrdom because of their rejection of idolatry testifies to the fact that they would as well keep the whole commandment if they viewed that as necessary. Trypho notes the force of Justin's argument and says: "This is precisely what puzzles us, and rightly so, because, when you endure such things, why don't you observe all other customs (also), which we are now discussing?" (*Dial.* 19.1)[51].

The implication of this submission of the pre-Nicene sources is that the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit does not go against the grain of the Jewish understanding of monotheism. In fact, there is a general lack of awareness that the admission of the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit may create theological problems to the Jewish concept of monotheism (see Skarsaune, 1957:355). If such awareness were there, Justin would not have raised the issue of ητερος θεος with Trypho, for such a debate would have hurt Justin's case. Trypho, on the other hand, would have raised our attention to the incompatibility of the idea of ητερος θεος with the monotheism in his dialogue with Justin, as the point of contention would be known to be untrue by everyone. Already before Justin, Philo had written about the Logos as δευτερος θεος (*Qu. Gen.* II.62) and the Jewish thought of the time did not seem to have an issue to raise against such a position.

[51] As far as Trypho is concerned, if the Christians are willing to die for their monotheistic conviction they are not only monotheistic, but should also observe all the Jewish customs.

A third-century Rabbinic statement recorded in the *Babylonian Talmud, Megilla* 13a (Socino trans., 74) and attributed to Rabbi Johanan, defines whoever rejects idolatry as a 'Jew', that is 'one who proclaims the unity (of God)'. Skarsaune has noted a Hebrew wordplay here: "'Jehudi' is modified to 'Jechidi', one who proclaims that God is one, 'echad'. So, the one who proclaims the unity or the one-ness of God is the one who rejects idolatry" (Skarsaune, 1957:360,361). According to this criterion, as Skarsaune has noted, the Christians of the third-century Church qualify as *Jechidim*. The Church therefore did not just understand itself as monotheistic; the Jewish faith also included Christianity under monotheism as is indicated in the *Babylonian Talmud, Megilla* 13a[52].

By the fourth-century, we begin to notice clearly that the question of monotheism is not a Jew/Christian problem, but that is is rather an inner Christian problem. Tertullian, for example, writes the book *Adversus Iudaeos* using Justin's *Dialogue* as one of his authorities. Earlier on in his book, Justin had raised the issue of the Trinity, but Tertullian completely ignores the discussion in his argument against the Jews. Instead, he leaves the problem of ητερος θεος and whether the theology of this second divine person and the third divine person threatens biblical monotheism for his other book, *Against Praxeas.* The significance of Tertullian's presentation in *Adversus Iudaeos* is that it helps us to see that the Trinity/Monotheism tension is not a Christian/Jew problem, but rather that it is an inner Christian problem (Skarsaune, 1957:359). The controversy began within Christianity itself and among people who held high offices within the communion of faith (Wolfson, 1970:577) -- they are the ones who advanced what became known as the Monarchianism of the second and the third centuries and not Judaism (ibid.581-585). Both Tertullian and Origen, firm proponents of separate υποςταςεις, are in fact on record as having named Christians and not Jews as their opponents (Tertullian in *Against Praxeas,* 3; and Origen in *Comm. Ioan.* II.2; cf Wolfson, 1970:581).

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[52] A more extensive parallel of this understanding of a 'Jew' is available in *Esther Rabbah* 6:2. Trans. H Freedman and M Simon, London, 1939, 73f. This understanding of a 'Jew' that included the Christians continues until the start of the 7th century AD. This date coincides with the conclusion of the Babylonian Talmud and the rise of the Muslim empire (see Teugels, 1999:note 3).

2.3.2 The Christian thought moved away from Anthropomorphisms

The period of the early Church, which corresponds with the Talmudic age of the Jewish history, understood the nature of this one God they worshipped in a corporeal and material sense. It is important to note that the rabbinic sources of the Talmudic age are rich in the sort of anthropomorphic language we see throughout the Old Testament[53]. As Klein has indicated, "some of the crudest biblical anthropomorphisms are perpetuated and even amplified in the Targums -- alongside the common circumlocution and paraphrastic avoidance of human forms" (Klein, 1982:xxii). In his conclusion, Klein observes that "the frequency of anti-anthropomorphisms is much smaller than has hitherto been asserted" (ibid.:xx). The point here then is that the rabbis generally thought and expressed themselves within a framework that did not talk of God in abstract terms. This trend was completely reversed by the Church Fathers.

What seemed to bother the Rabbis was how to conceptualise the transcendence and the nearness of God with respect to the general problems of life. The kind of transcendence they saw in this God made it impossible for them to understand his nearness merely as a

> general presence and as something inherent in the reality of nature itself. But this transcendence is not experienced as passivity either. This deity is living and active, but as such he must make himself known in the relativity of the phenomenal world; not, however, as a revelation of a static Existence which of necessity permeates the entire world, but in a liberating and guiding acting in which he distinguishes himself from this world (Berkhof, 1979:14,15).

The idea that God is now far away and hidden, but when he breaks into the world of our reality to help he is infinitely closer, is what is achieved by the anthropomorphic language in

[53] Walker, however, argues to the contrary. For him: "The books of Israel's history and religion took no pains to obviate the appearance of a very distinct anthropomorphic character, but the time came when the main feature of Jewish criticism and exegesis was the anxiety to remove or soften down all references to God that could give rise to misunderstanding in the popular mind.... The clearest expression of this hermeneutic principle is to be found in the Targums, where 'everything was avoided that could lead to erroneous or undignified conceptions of God" (Walker, 1903:679). Walker is not alone in this position; other scholars who articulate a similar idea are H Soligsohn and J Traub, T Walker, W Bacher, E Schurer, A Sperber, Y Komlosh, B Grossfield, and M McNamara. For full bibliographical information on these scholars, see Klein, 1982:ix.

the Targums, especially in the use of the concept of *Memra*[54]

In the course of breaking with Judaism and entering into the Hellenistic world, the Church Fathers clearly moved away from the Talmudic use of anthropomorphic language in putting forth the nature of God. Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 114.3, commenting on Psalm 8:3, says: "Your teachers ... think that the Father of the universe, and God unbegotten, has hands and feet and fingers like a compound living creature".[55] There could perhaps be two reasons why the Fathers were against anthropomorphisms. The first reason could be derived from Justin's argument above. The language is incapable of sufficiently emphasising the utter difference and the complete otherness of "the Father of the universe", and "God unbegotten", a scenario which ultimately undervalues the significance of the incarnation which the Fathers saw as a fundamental scriptural truth. It is in the incarnation alone that God, who is utterly different and completely other, turns himself toward man in order that man may know him. We know God not because we can relate to the anthropomorphic language, but because he has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

The other reason could relate to the problem of imaging God -- anthropomorphisms tend to image God and may not allow the word to come through clearly. The word, says Berkhof, "comes sovereignly from God, or it does not come at all; it can not be manipulated or conjured up, but demands total trust and obedience" (Berkhof, 1979:15). The Fathers argued, in line with the Old Testament, that all images used in speech and thought of God are to be used solely as transparent media through which the word of God may sound and under no circumstance should such a speech image God.[56]

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[54] See a full discussion on *Memra* in 1.3.2.4.3 of this research. See also Kadushin, 1972; Hayward, 1981 and Urbach, 1975.

[55] More examples of the Fathers' views of the Talmudic anthropomorphisms are in GG Stroumsa, 'Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ', HTR 76 (1983), pp 269- 88; esp. 270- 73.

[56] A good example of a Nicene theologian who argued like this is Gregory Nazienzen (see Orations, 28.12ff.; 29.2; 31.7; 33.17). It is important to note, however, that anthropomorphism in and of itself is not a problem in theology. It only becomes a problem when we begin to see God as inherently anthropomorphic and when our language about God is not controlled and adapted by whom God has revealed himself to be. Otherwise, since it is us human beings who must know God, there is a level of anthropomorphism which is ineradicable, or else as Mackintosh once said: "What the conception of God may become when once the life-blood of anthropomorphism has been drained out, we see in the God of Mohammed. The Deity pictured in the Koran is

2.3.3 The Christian thought adopted the Greek categories

The Fathers found a new way of understanding and expressing the uniqueness of this God within the framework of the principle of the Greek μοναρχια (absolute monarchy or sovereignity of God). Some elements of Greek thought that came to picture and which heavily influenced the manner of speaking about God are those that connect θεος with the Greek concepts of τιθεμι, θεος or θεαμαι. The other Greek concepts that influenced the direction of the Christian understanding of God are the transcendence of God, indivisibility of God and the idea of the 'Spirit' as well as the 'form' of God (see Prestige, 1952:1-24).

The term μοναρχια, as Prestige explains, "... is a metaphor from kingship. ... The Fathers apply the word nearly always to the absolute monarchy of God, and its primary sense of omnipotence. But since the whole significance of omnipotence is that it can be wielded only by one ultimate power, it really comes to mean monotheism" (Prestige, 1952:94,95). God described in these terms, the Fathers believed, was a μοναρχια because in the first place he was αγενετος, that is 'unoriginated'. The αγενετον, explains Prestige, "exists *per se*: its cause lies within its own being ... it enjoys perfection. To the αγενετον alone belong inherently omnipotence, perfection, creative power and goodness, glory, eternity, causation and wisdom" (ibid.:46). They thus understood God, in the words of Theophilus, as the one who has

> ... no beginning because he is uncreated; he is immutable because he is immortal. He is called God because he established everything on his own steadfastness (Ps 103:5). ... He is Lord because he is master of the universe, Father because he is the maker of the universe, Demiurge and Maker because he is creator and maker of the universe, most high because he is above everything, almighty because he controls and surrounds everything (Theophilus quoted in Kaiser, 1982:48, 49)

God could be said to be all of these by virtue of his being the αγενετον, the Absolute.

'like the desert, monotonous and barren, an unfigured surface, unresponsive immensity" (Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, 4th ed.1934:111)

However, the Fathers, did not just view God as μοναρχια or αγενετον. Whereas they understood God in these terms, they also emphasised the fact that He is ineffable (αρρετος). The Greeks acknowledged that Orpeus, Homer and Hesiod gave names and genealogies to their gods, thus they understood their gods as mere names without either deeds or substance behind them. The Christians, on the other hand, acknowledged one God, Yahweh, who has both deeds and substance or individuality of existence. Yahweh was not given a name by anyone as the Greeks did to their gods. He is thus ineffable in that sense. Because he is ineffable in the sense just stated, they also understood him to be actually uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassable, incomprehensible, and illimitable, in contrast to what they saw in the Greek gods (Prestige, 1952:50). It is therefore important to note that the early church used these terms in a qualified and not in an absolute sense. The terms served the purpose of preserving the integrity of Yahweh and distinguishing him and his unique operations -- Yahweh, the God the Christians worship, is ineffable, does things that can be identified and is not just a mere name but has individuality of existence.

2.4 The Incarnation Question

2.4.1 The Christian Faith's point of departure

Whereas the Fathers agreed with the Talmudic faith on the issue of monotheism, which accents μονος, they saw an inner necessity in the Scriptures that led them to read the Old Testament's conception of θεος differently.[57] In the Scriptures, the Fathers saw the Son and the Holy Spirit in a way that required them to say that God became incarnate, suffered on the cross, and redeemed mankind by dying and rising again. [58] The Talmudic faith would have

[57] Distinction must be made between Judaism and the faith of the Old Testament. Berkhof has explained this difference as follows: Judaism "began with the groups who returned from the Babylonian captivity in the 5th and 4th centuries before Christ, but did not get its specific structure until after the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) in the exegetical methods applied to the OT by the Jewish Scribes, an exegesis and application that is embodied in the Talmud which received its definite shape about AD 500. The Talmud may be regarded as parallel of the NT, since both integrate the OT in a new faith perspective" (Berkhof, 1979:22).

[58] In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Judaism is portrayed as having no problems with the issue of a 'second God' (see *Dial.* 56.16; 57.1; 58.2; 60.3; 63.1), however Judaism recoils at the idea that this other God actually became man. In Dial. 68.1 Trypho says: "You are enduring to prove an incredible and almost impossible thing, that God endured to be born and to become man!"

agreed fully with the Christian faith had Christianity defined what it came to call the *personae* simply as three attributes of God. The Fathers could not drop the incarnation, although it was offensive to the Talmudic faith. As far as the Fathers were concerned, it was precisely in the offensive nature of the incarnation that its strength lies. Tertullian's argument with Marcion helps us to see clearly the priority the Fathers attributed to the incarnation:

> Which is more unworthy of God, which is more likely to raise a blush of shame, that God should be borne, or that he should die? That he should bear the flesh, or the cross? be circumcised, or be crucified, be cradled or be coffined, be laid in a manger, or in a tomb? ... The son of God was crucified. I am not ashamed of it, because it seems shameful. And the Son of God dies, it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And he was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain because it is impossible (Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 6.1and 6.4)

What makes the Christian understanding of God unique is the distinct Christian understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation. We have emphasised *distinct* because incarnation as a concept is available in other religions and philosophies as well. What makes the Christian concept of the incarnation unique is that by this concept the Christians mean that God endured to be born, to become man, and to suffer. Augustine, for example argued that the doctrine of the incarnation is also in the books of the Platonists. He is quick to say, however, that in the same books there are no evidence that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (see Augustine, *Confessions,* vii. 9; cf Jn. 1:14). Trypho, in his debate with Justin, accepts the idea of a 'second God', but he immediately recoils at the idea of the 'second God' becoming man.[59] His answer to Justin is that: "You are endeavouring to prove an incredible and almost impossible thing, that God endured to be born and to become man" (Justin, *Dialogue*, 68.1). Thus, as Fulton has clearly observed, "nowhere is the union of God and man so concrete and definite, and so universal in its import as in the Christian religion" (Fulton, 1921:458). In modern times, CS Lewis has made the same point regarding the story of the incarnation. According to Lewis:

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[59] Note that Trypho was here in agreement with Philo. Philo, as DM Baillie reminds us, viewed Logos as an intermediate being, between God and man. This idea of the Logos is fundamentally different from the idea of the Logos in the New Testament. According to Saint John, Logos became flesh, ie was both God and man (see Morris, 1971:n.143). In fact, Philo was not even sure whether Logos was personal or impersonal — he simply never asked this question (see Morris, 1971:n. 145)

> (The story) is not transparent to reason: We could not have invented it ourselves. It has not the suspicious *priori* lucidity of Pantheism or of Newtonian physics. It has the seemingly arbitrary and idiosyncratic character which modern science is slowly teaching us to put up with in this willingful universe. .. If any message from the core of reality ever were to reach us, we should expect to find in it just that unexpectedness, that willful, dramatic anfractuosity which we find in the Christian faith. It has the master touch -- the rough, male taste of reality, not made by us, or, indeed, for us, but rather hitting us in the face (Lewis, 1940:13)

Because of the Christian explanation of the incarnation, it follows that the Christian formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is distinct and in a class of its own. One of the difficulties that some African theologians have with the doctrine of the Trinity is the suspicion that the Christian Trinitarianism has its source in Neo-Platonism and may not have anything to do with the Christian revelation (see Setiloane, 1979:65). To the critics of the doctrine of the Trinity, such as Professor Setiloane, we must admit that Trinitarianism is not unique to the Christian doctrine of God. However, we must not forget to mention also that the Christian understanding of the incarnation gives the Christian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity a distinct and different flavour altogether.

The θεος question, which dominated the early Church in its very early stages, was thus the problem of the incarnation. The Fathers posed the question: "Is the divine that has appeared on earth and reunited man with God identical with the Supreme divine, which rules heaven and earth, or is it a demigod?" (Pelikan, 1971:172). The answer to this question was obvious to the Church. Jesus, "... the Redeemer did not belong to some lower order of divine reality, but was God himself" (Pelikan, 1971:173). Though the Church recognised that the Divinity of Christ permeates the entire Scripture, it found the following three sets of the Scripture particularly helpful in coming to this position: (1) passages of identity which posit simple identity of Christ with God, (2) passages of distinction which distinguish one 'Lord' from another 'Lord', and (3) passages of derivation which suggest that the Son is from the Father (see Pelikan, 1971:175). Consequently, the Fathers taught that Jesus, who made God known to the church, is Yahweh the God of Israel; the one who gives life, form and value; the one who gives harmony, order and development.

2.4.2 The Pneumatological Question

The flip side of the Christological problem, however, was the Pneumatological question. The Fathers posited the problem of the Holy Spirit with the view of Christ as the reference point (Pelikan, 1971:213). Initially the question was: How does the Divine that is Christ relate to the Holy Spirit? Later on, the Fathers accentuated the relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit. They noticed from the Scripture that the Holy Spirit who operates in the Church (gives gifts, sanctifies, empowers, and so on) and in history and as it were exegetes the Father is the very same Spirit of Yahweh who was known in Israel. Their problem was simply how to differentiate the three (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) from each other.

2.5 The basic Issues in the Development of the doctrine of the Trinity

Five stages may be distinguished in relating the Christian concepts of the incarnation and Pneumatology to the idea of monotheism that the Church of that time shared with Judaism, as we have demonstrated previously. These stages are explained well in WA Brown's *Christian Theology in Outline*, 1907.

2.5.1 Formal Identification of the Pre-existent Christ with the Greek Logos

By the time of the apologists, the second person of the Trinity was known as Son, Power, and Wisdom. However, the term that was to play a major role in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was Logos (Prestige, 1952:116). The Fathers employed the Logos as a theological term in three distinct ways.

2.5.1.1 Logos as the Interpretive revelation and expression of the Father

Ignatius, for example, held the view that there is one God and that that God has revealed himself through his Son who is known to be his Logos, Jesus Christ (*Magn.* 8.2). Irenaeus taught that the Father is revealed through his Logos, the Son, to all whom God wills to be revealed (Haer. 2.30.9; 4.6.5; 4.6.6). Origen argued that the idea of Logos has the connotation of the capacity to interpret the hidden things of the universe. For Origen, Christ

is Logos because he interprets the secrets of God's mind and discloses to all other beings the mystery of God (*On St John* I. 19, iii; *De Princ.* I.2.3). Clement explained that God's Logos is his image (*protr.*10, 98.3)

2.5.1.2 Logos as Wisdom

Justin Matyr taught that the entire human race shares in the Logos, and that those like Socrates and Heraclitus who lived with the Logos are Christians, even though they may be regarded as atheists (*apol.* I.46.2). Athenagoras held the view that the Son is the Logos, the Mind, the Wisdom of the Father (*suppl.* 24.1), while Tertullian expounded the idea that although God existed alone before the beginning of all things, he was not really alone because he had with him his own reason which he possessed in Himself. According to Tertullian, this reason, God's own consciousness, is what the Greeks call Logos (*Prax.* 5).

2.5.1.3 Logos as the Divine fiat or Will

The Fathers saw a connection between God's Logos and his fiat in the Old Testament's accounts of creation. Justin explains that the commandments of Christ are brief and terse because Christ, who is God's Logos, is the power of God (*Apol.* I.14.5). Hippolytus sees the Logos as the causative agency of all that exists (*Ref.* 10.33.2).

2.5.2 Eternal Generation of the Logos

Having understood Christ in terms of Logos, it is understandable that the historical figure of Jesus Christ would hence be caught up in the purely speculative Greek style of thinking. The doctrine of the generation of the Logos was articulated from the concept of the αγενετος, that is the 'unoriginated' (see Prestige, 1952:46). The concept of the αγενετος functioned in two ways. In the first place it explained the eternal Fatherhood of God and as such it highlighted the divinity of Christ against Origen's subordinationism or the Arian conception of the Son as a creature. In the words of Athanasius, the Son is the proper offspring of the Father (see

Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1. 16; cf *De Synodis* 48). Since he is the offspring of the Father's Being and therefore consubstantial with him, the Deity of the Father and of the Son are one and the same (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1. 9, 39, 58, 61; 3. 4, 6). But in the second place, the concept of the αγενετος also distanced God from the rest of the created order. The created order has a beginning that is attributed to the 'unoriginated' One.

Also used next to the principle of αγενετον was the idea of χορεω. The technical term χορεω was useful in expressing the nature of the immanence of God. God's transcendence had already been captured by the concept of the αγενετον. Literally χορεω describes the idea that God 'penetrates', 'fills' or 'contain' (χορεω) all things while he himself is uncontained (αχορετος) by any or all together (Prestige, 1952:49). What however is in view in this context, is the theological application of the term to the relation of God as he is both in himself and to the world. By this term, it was understood that God supports and frames the world not as a monad, but as a Trinity. These actions, 'supporting' and 'framing', are undertaken by the Triune God not merely in the external sense, rather more in the sense of 'permeative sustenance' (Prestige, 1952:34). The entire Godhead took part in this 'permeative sustenance'. Again, the entire Godhead related to the world in this way because, in the first place, the persons of the Trinity themselves are in a relationship of περιχορεσις.

2.5.3 Consubstantiality of the Son with the Father

The concept of the 'intrinsic constitution' or, put simply, 'substance', or the Greek ουσια, is what became the theological term for the concept of the one-ness of God. The term ουσια originally came from the Stoics. The Christian thought rejected it as early as Justin, as is evident in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho,* 128:4. Origen, however, picked it up and used it not in the material sense in which the Stoics used it, but in a new way -- a metaphorical usage that accented the individuality of existence. Commenting on Proverbs 8:22, Origen maintains that the Wisdom of God is an ουσια. In *St. John frag.* 37, he insists that the reason the Scripture compares the Holy Spirit to wind is because the Spirit is in fact an *ousia* and not just a divine activity without individuality of existence. Prestige has noted that in

commentaries preserved only in Latin translations (*Numbers* 12:1 and *Leviticus* 13:4), Origen applies the concept of a single substance to the divine triad (Prestige, 1952:192).

By the time we come to Eusebius (*Eccl. theol. 2.23.1*), the Christian thought has begun to teach that there are not two gods, nor two αγγενετα, nor two αναρχα, nor two ουσια but one αρχη. This position compares favourably with Athanasius, who argued that the Father's ουσια is the Father himself, in other words the Father is his ουσια (see *De Synodis,* 34) and ουσια as such is exhaustive of the whole being of God (see *Contra Arianos*, 4.2).[60] If ουσια is exhaustive of the whole being of God, then we can understand why the concept of ομοουσιος of the Father with the Son was crucial in Athanasius' formulation of his Christology.

Athanasius' doctrine of ομοουσιος (consubstantiality of the Persons of the Trinity) is a further development of the concept of ουσια. While ουσια connoted God as Being, the concept of ομοουσιος denoted that in God, one and the same identical Substance "... without any division, substitution, or differentiation of content, is permanently presented in three distinct objective forms" (Prestige, 1952:xxix; 168ff; 188). The Son is consubstantial with the Father (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1. 9, 39, 58, 61), thus to know the Son is to know the Father in his essential nature (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1. 4 – 19, 25 – 34, 2. 57f.; 3. 1 – 6; 4. 1 - 10).

> The Son and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature and in the identity of the one Godhead. The Godhead of the Son is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none but he. And since they are one, and the Godhead himself is one, the same things are said of the Son as are said of the Father, except his being said to be the 'Father' (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 3. 5).

The Holy Spirit, Athanasius argued, is divine because the Spirit has the same oneness in being with the Son as the Son has with the Father (Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem*, 2. 3f; 3. 1, 3). Consequently, the Holy Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem*, 1. 4 - 14, 23ff, 27).

[60] The book *Contra Arianos* (356-362 AD) may not have been written by Athanasius himself.

Based on the doctrine of the divine consubstantiality, the fathers therefore developed two important ideas. The first is the idea of oneness in Being and Activity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The second was the idea of coinherence. For the fathers, coinherence meant "... a complete mutual indwelling in which each person while remaining what he is by himself as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, is wholly in the other as the others are wholly in him" (Torrance, 1994:10).

2.5.4 The idea of the Eternal distinction within the Divine Nature

Since Athanasius' concept of the ομοουσιος could not adequately distinguish the Father from the Son, there was need for another theological model to highlight this distinction. We owe the final statement of the distinction of the Father from the Son to the Cappadocian theologians (Basil, Gregory of Nazienzus and Gregory of Nyssa). By working on the concepts of the υποσταςις and ουσια, the Cappadocians gave the needed distinction between the Father and the Son that could address the issue of tritheism (polytheism) and Sebbalian modalism with new impetus. They also gave the third member of the Trinity a definite place and character as a hypostasis in the Godhead, consubstantial with the Father and proceeding from the Father through the Son.

The term ουσια, taken from the Stoics and used in an entirely different way, had helped the Fathers and the apologists to capture the one-ness of God taught by the Scripture. How were they now to express this Divine who evidently was triune? In order to express this Divine, whose one-ness they had expressed in terms of ουσια, the Fathers found the Latin *persona*[61] or the Greek υποσταςις[62] helpful in designating the persons of the Trinity in the same way as

[61] The Latin word *persona* designated mask worn by an actor on the ancient Roman stage. Later it was used of both the actor and his/her part in the play. In the development of this term, it got the idea of the part one plays in social intercourse generally. The Latins did not use persona as equivalent to 'human beings' (see Webb, 1920:35).

[62] The literal meaning of the Greek word υποσταςις is 'standing under or below'. In its metaphorical usage, it signified concrete existence as opposed to a mere appearance with nothing solid or permanent underlying it. Used in this sense, υποσταςις is equivalent to the Latin word *substantia* (see Webb 1920:37).

the Greek προςοπον, which was in common usage but for some reason was not made a theological term. It is thought that Tertullian, who as a matter of fact brought the term *persona* to the doctrine of the Trinity, actually adopted it from his Greek contemporary Hippolytus, with whom he enjoyed a good working relationship (Prestige, 1952:159-160).

The Greeks used προςοπον to denote a concrete representation of an individual; however, the word never became a theological term. Tertullian adopted this concept but used the Latin *persona* to express it. This explains why Tertullian could write phrases such as these: "'... the Son acknowledges the Fathers speaking in his own *persona'* or '... whatsoever therefore the substance of the Word was, that I call *persona*. .. and while I recognise the Son, I assert his distinction as second to the Father'" (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 7). Latin *persona* in these occurrences means basically the same thing as the Greek προςοπον. In the final analysis, the Greek philosophical theology used the term υποςταςις instead of προςοπον in their description of what the Latins called the *personae* of God. It is not clear why υποςταςις was preferred, since there is no evidence that προςοπον was ever discredited as a theological term.

The Greek υποςταςις was originally applied to the being or *substantia* of God. However, it was gradually transferred to signify "content or substance of God corresponding to what in case of ordinary objects constitutes their determinate extension" (Prestige, 1952:166). Thus the term υποςταςις was changed and it no longer meant ' content' or 'substance of God', rather, it meant person. The identification of υποςταςις with person was itself a revolutionary development as, in the words of Zizioulas, υποςταςις no longer meant "an adjunct to a being", as was the case in its earlier application, rather it becomes a distinctive way in which the being of God exists (Zizioulas, 1995:39). In the course of these changes, o*usia* or being was used exclusively for the unity of the three persons. The point the Greek context intended to make by using ουςια and υποςταςις in this manner was that in υποςταςις, the being of God or ουςια achieves 'concrete independence', 'empirical objectivity' or simply individuality. Thus, as Prestige explains,

> ... when the doctrine of the Trinity came to be formulated as one *ousia* in three *upostastaseis* it implied that God regarded from the point of view of internal analysis

> is one object; but that regarded from the point of view of external presentation, He is three objects; His unity being safeguarded by the doctrine that these three objects of presentation are not merely precisely similar, ... but, in a true sense identically one. The sum' God + God + God' adds up not to 3 Gods, but simply to God because the word God, as applied to each person distinctly, expresses a Totum and an absolute which is incapable of increment either in quantity or in quality (Prestige, 1952:169).

The Greeks did not always see the distinction between the "internal analysis" and the "external presentation" because as far as they are concerned, υποσταςις and *substantia* are mutually exchangeable. This situation presented a critical problem to theology. Moreover, the subtle historical roots of υποσταςις and *persona* fueled the confusion. Eastern theology began the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity from the reference point of *persona* – the part played by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the existence of God. Due to its preference for this strategy, Eastern theology saw the Father as constituting the source and bond of unity in the Trinity while Western theology saw Substance as the uniting factor.

According to Eastern theology, the Father binds together all three persons or the hypostaseis as one God, because the being of God is identical with the being of the Father. Thus the Father is God *simpliciter,* the Son is God from God, proceeding out of God by eternal generation and the Spirit is God from God, proceeding out of God by eternal spiration. This is also the way the East distinguished the Persons of the Trinity. As far as Eastern theology is concerned, theology can talk of the three hypostaseis, namely the Father as the Divine *simpliciter* or Divine 'fountain', the Son as eternally generating from the Father, and the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father by eternal spiration. Consequently, the East could argue that there is one God because there is only One Father, the Divine *simpliciter* (see Lossky, 1957, ch 3 especially p.58).

The Latins, on the other hand, used a less flexible language, *substantia,* and made it their starting point in articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. For the Latins, the oneness of God does not rest on the person or hypostasis of the Father; rather, it rests primarily in the divine essence. According to Augustine, "the divinity, or to express it more precisely, the Godhead itself, is the unity of Trinity" (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 1:8:15). For the Latin west, there is one God because there is one divine essence. What distinguishes the Persons of the Trinity

according to this scheme are the relations. The Father is unoriginated, the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The Latin theology of the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son is what developed into the *filioque* debate (see Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 5:14:15; 15:27:48).

2.5.5 The concept of the double Procession

The concept of the double procession or the *Filioque* (Latin for 'and from the Son') is a contentious point of Trinitarian doctrine on which the West and the East visibly went different ways. Before the *Filioque* debate, patristic theology generally understood the oneness of God in terms of God the Father. The maxim for the Greek patristic theology in particular was 'There is one God because there is one Father' (Lossky, 1957:58). For the Eastern theologians, this statement did not mean that the Son and the Spirit are any less divine than the Father. Rather, the statement meant that the Father is the 'fountain of the deity' -- the Father possesses the divine essence in and from himself alone, whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit possess it from the Father. The being of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is truly divine, however it is the Father's being communicated to them by the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal spiration of the Spirit. Subordination is therefore involved; however, it is not a subordination of essence, rather it is a subordination of hypostaseis or the manner in which the divine essence is obtained.

Clearly, at the base of the *Filioque* issue was Augustine's understanding of the divine essence. For him, the idea God did not mean directly Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, rather, as Eugene Portalie has explained, it meant the "more general notion of the Godhead, conceived concretely and personally no doubt, [and obviously] not as any one Person in particular" (Portalie, 1975:130-31). Having given prominence to essence, the Persons for Augustine existed only relatively to each other. In other words, the hypostaseis were concretized as Persons and distinguished from each other only by their relations with each other. And so for Augustine, the Father is personally concrete and distinguished from the Son because the Person of the Father is the cause of the Person of the Son by the act of eternal generation. The Father is also the cause of the Holy Spirit by the act of eternal

spiration. Here Augustine saw two kinds of relations (Father-Son and Spirator-Spirit) which distinguish Father and Son from each other and Father and Spirit from each other. But how was the Holy Spirit to be distinguished from the Son? In an answer to this question, Augustine explained that the Holy Spirit is caused by the Father as well as by the Son. (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5:14:15).

As far as Augustine was concerned, the doctrine of the *Filioque* meant that the Holy Spirit could not be regarded as another Son (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15:27:48). The Eastern theologians saw in this something of a 'double fountain' of the Father and the Son rather than what was known as the Father being the 'fountain of deity'. But for Augustine there was no inconsistency here because for him the unity of God is not in the person of the Father, rather it is in the divine essence. Consequently, for Augustine the divine essence common to the Father and the Son thus acted as a single source of the Spirit (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5:14:15).

The Greek-Latin debate never really ended. However, the Church Fathers on both sides were unanimous that the Scripture teaches one God revealed in three Persons. JND Kelly summarizes: "The badge of orthodoxy in the East was one ουσια, three υποστασεις" (Kelly, 1977:254), while in the Latin West the 'badge' became one essence or substance, *substantia*, in three persons, *personae.* The varied terminology used indicate different emphasis, however theologians and historians of dogma like GL Prestige (Prestige, 1936:235) and Yves Congar (Congar, 1983:8,9) argue that there was what could be considered a general consensus. The consensus was the conviction amongst the Fathers that the God they worshipped was one God, not three, but at the same time they were prepared to fully recognise the distinct and unconfused representations or individuations of that one God in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

2.6 The Trinity as a Primary name for God

By the end of the fourth century, 'Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit' was used as a primary name for God in Christian worship (Duck, 1991:78).[63] And so the 'Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' had by the end of the fourth century become the primary name of God and not merely a series of metaphors that named the one God.[64] Christians of the time did not see a separation between what God is and what he reveals of himself. Talking in the context of metaphors applied to God, Thomas Torrance warns that: "The One way God has thus chosen in making himself known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and addressing us in human language specifically adapted to his self-revelation as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit sets aside any ways of speaking about him that we may devise and choose for ourselves" (Torrance, 1992:140).

Contemporary theologians seem to agree that the reason God is revealed as Triune is because his essential being is Triune in the first place. This line of argument is seen in Paul Jewett, Dale Moody and Karl Rahner. In the words of Jewett, "God makes himself known as Trinity because he is in himself Trinity" (Jewett, 1991:305). Dale Moody reasons that the only reason the economic Trinity corresponds to the immanent Trinity is because "God has revealed his reality" (Moody, 1981:115). Karl Rahner puts accent on the axiomatic unity of the two. He says: *"The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent'*

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[63] Allan Richardson, talking about the Hebrew understanding of a name, says that a "... name does not merely distinguish a person from other persons, but is closely related to its bearer. Particularly in such powerful persons as deities, the name is regarded as part of the being of the divinity so named and of his character and powers" (Richardson, 1957:157). If we go with the Hebrew understanding of the name of God, then we quickly recognise that the Jews came to avoid using the sacred name *Yahweh* at first, replacing it with *adonai* and later in Rabbinic Judaism by *hassem*, 'the name' (Bietenhard, 1967:268). Thus to say the Trinity became the primary name of God is to say that the Christian faith effectively used it as a circumlocution of the proper name of God - *Yahweh* (see Duck, 1991:140).

[64] Some scholars argue that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is neither a divinely revealed nor ecclesiastically produced name, but is a metaphorical representation of the Deity. This argument takes the position that all language used to speak of God is metaphorical, and that we are free to construct new language or theological models when the old have lost their quality. A case in point is Sallie McFague's *Models of God, Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (SCM Press, 1987). She represents the doctrine of God in threefold form as Mother, Lover and Friend. She argues, "the three metaphors of God as parent, lover and friend form a trinity expressing God's impartial, reuniting, and reciprocal love to the world" (ibid., 91, 92). Other metaphors which have been proposed to take the place of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are 'Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer' (see Gail Ramsaw, 'Naming the Trinity: Orthodoxy and Inclusivity' in Worship 60 (1986): 492); 'Fountain, Offspring, Wellspring' (RC Duck, *Gender and the Name of God*, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1991:189); 'Abba, Servant, Paraclete' (G Ramsaw, 'Naming the Trinity', p. 497); 'Of Whom, Through Whom, In Whom' (G Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God Language,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995:91).

Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (Rahner, 1974:22; emphasis in the original)[65]. The other theologians who have accepted Karl Rahners' rule, as Ted Peters calls it, (Peters, 1993:22, 96-103) are Jürgen Moltmann (Moltmann, 1974:240, 245), Eberhard Jüngel (Jüngel, 1983:368-373), Alvin F Kimel (Kimel, 1992:201-202) and the feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson (Johnson, 1993:199-201, 227-228).

2.7 The Creeds

The confessional stream of Creeds of the Western Church indicates clearly that by the fourth century AD, the Trinity had become God's name. The Apostles Creed already in use in the fourth century defines in absolute essential terms that the God of the Christian worship is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This particular Creed was used as a baptismal creed. It thus indicates that, by this time, the Christians assented to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The other creed worth mentioning is the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was initially drawn up at the Council of Nicea (AD 325) and was completed at the Council of Constantinople (AD 381). This Creed affirms unequivocally the full and equal divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The most complete formal statement of the Trinitarian doctrine, however, is the so-called Athanasian Creed or the *Quicunque vult*.[66]

The *Quicunque Vult* is consistent with both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Lohse has observed that it sets forth the import of the earlier creeds "... more profoundly and better than did the fathers themselves"(Lohse, 1966:54). This document, traditionally attributed to Athanasius though composed in Latin and generally known to the Greek East, appeared in Southern France about AD 500[67]. St Caesarius of Arles, who was a great admirer of St Augustine, probably wrote this statement. He could have composed this statement either as a

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[65] For excellent interpretation of Karl Rahner, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God for us: *The Trinity and the Christian Life*, (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1991) 209- 41.

[66] For elaborate comments on the creeds of the early Church, see JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London, 1960; his other book- *Early Christian Creeds*, London, 1960; and the other *The Athanasian Creed*, London, 1964.

[67] Athanasius died in 376 AD and he wrote in Greek.

test of or as a guide to orthodoxy (Hill, 1985:5). There is ample evidence that the statement spread far and wide. At the inception of theological liberalism the *Quicunque Vult* was still regarded as the standard Christian position on the doctrine of God. From then on, the use of the document both as a creed in worship and as standard of theological orthodoxy has declined tremendously. Bray notes, for example, that the creed "...has not been translated by the ICET, nor does it appear in the *Alternative Service Book 1980*, probably because it is little used nowadays" (Bray, 1984 :208).

The decline of the use of the *Quicunque vult* is observable in the African context as well. Here the creed is of prominence only in a few of the so-called historical churches and rarely in indigenous Christianity that today is widely believed to wield numerical superiority. Even in those historical churches where the creed is still available, it is commonplace to notice that the creed is not treated as a theological document summarising crucial matters of faith that should better be understood and rightly appropriated. A situation such as this, explains Bray, "... is a pity because despite its length and repetiveness, which are not to our modern taste, the Creed remains the most readily accessible summary of classical orthodoxy" (Bray, 1984:175, 176). Because of these sentiments, we believe that one cannot provide a basic statement of the doctrine of the Trinity and fail to feature the *Quincunque Vult.* We quote it here extensively but omit the damnatory and the Christology clauses.

> ... we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the Persons nor dividing the *divine Being.* For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit, but the Godhead of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is all one, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit: the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated, the Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite, the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal; and yet there are not three Eternals but one Eternal, just as they are not three Uncreateds, nor three Infinites, but one Uncreated and one Infinite. In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty, and yet they are not three Almighties but one Almighty. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is. God, yet not three Gods but one God. Thus, the Father is the Lord, the Son is the Lord, and the Holy Spirit is the Lord, and yet not three Lords but one Lord.
>
> Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to confess each Person singly to be both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say: There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten; the Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten; the Holy Spirit is from the Father *and the Son,* not made nor created nor begotten, but

> proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son not three Sons; one Holy Spirit not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity there is no before or after, no greater or less, but all three Persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal. So that in all things, as has already been said, the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, is to be worshipped (Beckwith, 1981:32-33).

Bray notes with satisfaction that the text of this creed "... is well translated and faithfull to the meaning of the original" (Bray, 1984:211).

2.8 Conclusion

The question that the modern Christian faith faces is whether it can ignore the doctrinal statements of the early Church. This has happened with relative ease in the recent past, as we have seen in the case of the *Quincunque vult*, but it ought not to be so. In the words of Lohse, "an insight which the Christian church has gained, in human weakness and in historically contingent form to be sure, but yet with the help of the Holy Spirit, may and must not simply be discarded as rubbish, nor is it right to make the measure of temporary relevance the measure of dogma" (Lohse, 1966:15). The right approach to this problem is that which insists that the doctrinal statements of the early Church must be reinterpreted for our specific contexts[68].

By insisting on the relevance of the doctrinal statements of the early Church for the modern theological situation and for the African context in particular, we are not merely highlighting Creeds as important aspects of the Christian heritage that must be recited every time the church assembles. Rather, we are saying that the doctrinal statements of the early Church are an important Christian heritage and important as they are, we too need to win them for our unique situation and truly make the statements our own. In this regard, we need to state categorically that the African Church does not have to formulate afresh the doctrine of the Trinity, as if the Church in whose tradition it stands never did anything to that effect. What we need to do in the African context is not to ignore the Creeds, but to see them as an important heritage and to reinterpret them for the African context. In the words of Lohse, "...

[68] For a detailed discussion of the reinterpretation of the Creeds, see B Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (1966) pp.; 12-19. See also D Tracy *The Analogical Imagination* (1981) pp.; 154-192 on the significance of the reinterpretation of religious classics.

the decisions of the past must be interpreted, i.e., they must be, as it were, translated, if they are to be intelligible in our day" (Lohse, 1966:18). The inevitable question confronting us now is: In what manner may we reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity for the African situation?

The key to reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity is a proper understanding of the development of that doctrine (Lonergan, 1976:1-17) [69] As we have seen, the doctrine of the Trinity went through definite stages before it became what it is today. Lonergan, in his study of the Christian doctrines, believes that understanding the development of doctrine is useful if contemporary readers are to rightly understand the authority as well as the basic intellectual assumptions and convictions of the conciliar decrees which represent Christian orthodoxy. The issues that the Christian orthodoxy sought to clarify, were 1) that the Christian faith worships one God; 2) that God has made himself known in the Son and in the Holy Spirit; thus the three persons are not to be confused and neither may we divide the one Divine Being; and finally, (3) that the Father is from Himself, the Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father (and the Son). How will the African theology explain these issues to the African peoples, who rely primarily on indigenous nomenclature to access developments in their contexts?

[69] The question of what it is that 'dogmatic development' entails has been in discussion and as a result different responses have been mooted. JH Newman believes that the doctrinal content of the Christian church did not unfold in a straight line but it also maintained its identity from its origin to the Roman Catholic doctrine of its time (see Berkhof, 1985:59), the other model of dogmatic development is found in G Thomasius. According to Thomasius the development of doctrine moves from the Greeks (the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the person of Christ), to the North Africans (the doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin), to the medievalists (the work of Christ) and finally to the reformers (justification) (Berkhof, 1985:59). Clearly Newman and Thomasius seem to agree that succeeding doctrines do not only build on their predecessors, but that the predecessors are in most cases carried forward as foundations for the new doctrine (Berkhof, 1985:58). Berkhof agrees with this analysis and argues that in theology as in other classic studies, the new does not render obsolete the previous. Rather, we always "... return to earlier insights, be it never entirely from the same perspective" (ibid; 60). Lonergan seems to be using 'dogmatic development' in yet another way. For him 'dogmatic development seems to be about movement from the 'undifferentiated' scriptural picture to the 'differentiated' language of theology. For him what is crucial in "dogmatic development" is the process of movement from the 'undifferentiated' picture to the 'differentiated' language of theology.

Part Two

WESTERN THEOLOGIES' RESPONSES TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

What 'Substance' and 'Subject' are have for centuries determined how the Western theologies have understood the doctrine of God. Yet as a "matter of fact, terminologically speaking, 'substance' and 'subject' have the same meaning. Both are Latin renderings of the Greek *'hypokeimenon'*. Substance, *substantia,* is essence, that which subsist in itself, the status of the thing in its independence. Subject, *subiectus,* is that which underlies, which is underneath, in which qualities inhere, and which qualities are predicated in propositions. … Philosophical tradition has brought about separation between substance and subject. Substance has retained its original meaning of essence, that which underlies, while subject has come to mean the sum total of perceptions, images and feelings, that is, consciousness" (Rotenstreich, 1974:1). The early Western Christian thought reinterpreted the Christian orthodoxy in terms of substantia or essence while in recent times the Western Christian thought has responded to the doctrine of Trinity more in terms of subject and *perichoresis*.

3 God as Essence

3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the influence of the concept of 'substance' seen in the Neo-Platonic philosophy in the reinterpretation of 'one God' as taught by the Creeds. There seems to be a clear connection between the Aristotelian doctrine of the 'substance' and Augustine's choice of the abstract concept of the 'Godhead'. This chapter investigates this connection and then seeks to understand how Augustine and his followers would interpret 'one God' and 'three Persons' in view of their Neo-Platonic commitments. Some notable Neo-Platonic thinkers who followed the footsteps of Augustine are Boethius and Thomas Aquinas. Their works, as well as the Christian-Muslim-Jewish debates of the Middle Ages, are very crucial to the view of 'God as essence'.

The doctrine of the Trinity formulated from the perspective of 'God as essence' is important for the African Christianity, because this is the doctrine of God that the missionaries who planted the church in Africa in the middle and the latter part of the nineteenth century knew and taught. Up to this moment a greater part of the African church interprets the doctrine of the Trinity within the infrastructure of 'God as essence'. The reason for this is partly because the Christian denominations in Africa, the liturgies, the hymns, as well as the theologies that govern beliefs and conduct in the contemporary African situation reflect what was current in the West during the great missionary period (see Kinoti, 1994:74f).

3.2 Augustine and Neo-Platonism

The Western theology as it came down to us is Augustinian. Many scholars seem to agree that right from its beginnings, the Augustinian theology accessed the doctrine of the Trinity through Neo-Platonism. Augustine himself said that of all the non-Christians, the Neo-Platonists were closest to the Christians (Henle, 1954:xiv). It therefore comes as no surprise that Augustine sought to reinterpret the Christian dogma via the Neo-Platonic metaphysics, notably the metaphysics of Plotinus (Thompson, 1994:128). Turnbull, in clarifying the influence of Plotinus on Augustine, indicates that Augustine did not only directly quote Plotinus five times (*The City of God*, X, 2; X, 14; X, 16; *Confessions*, VII, x and xvii; and IX,

23-25), but more than quoting Plotinus, the works of Augustine show thorough acquaintance with the *Enneads*. Thus, as Turnbull indicates,

> To understand St. Augustine, one must be familiar with the language and ideas of Plotinus from whom he borrowed not only scattered thoughts, but the best part of his doctrine on Soul, on Providence, on the Transcendence of God, on evil as the negation of God, and on freedom; and his theory of time and eternity. It was the 'Platonists' (by which term he designated particularly Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus) who inspired that impatient desire of his to grasp the Truth, not only by faith but also by reason, since he was confident that in their writings he would find only what was in accord with the Holy Scriptures (Turnbull, 1934:249).[70]

Plotinus, a teacher of Porphyry and together with Origen students of Ammonius, is widely considered to be the founder of Neo-Platonism. Plotinus operated from a complex mix of Plato, Aristotle, the neo-Pythagoreans, and the Stoics (Marlan, 1967:352). Plotinus' doctrine of the One provides the prolegomena of the Agustinian understanding of the doctrine of God.

Plotinus believed that the One is the highest principle and as such it is above being and therefore absolutely transcendental (see *Enneads*, VI 9 [9], ch 4,11.24f. ch 7,11. 28f; V 4 [7], ch 1, 11. 4-8; V 2 [11], ch 1). This One, Plotinus went on, is also entirely undifferentiated, that is without multiplicity (*Enneads*, V 4[7]; VI [9], ch 3, 11. 39-45). Plotinus' doctrine of emanation indicates what he believes is the relationship between the One, Intelligence and the Soul. For him, Intelligence emanates from the One, and the Soul from Intelligence. In this process, the emanating entity does not diminish (*Enneads*, VI 9 [9], ch 9; V 1[10], ch 3,5-7 cf III 8 [30], ch 8,1. 11) and it remains outside its product, while at the same time it is present in it (ibid., VI 4 [7], ch 3; VI 9 [9], ch 7). For Plotinus, this emanation is completely involuntary; it is a result of an inner necessity - what is full must overflow, what is mature must beget (ibid, V 4 [7], ch 1, 11.26-41; V 1 [10], ch 6, 1.37; V 2 [11], ch 1, 1.8).

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[70] See Augustine's own estimation of the Platonists, especially Plotinus, in the following excerpts: "After many centuries and much contention, a philosophy has finally been evolved which in my opinion is entirely true. It is not limited to this world, it reveals another, the Intelligible world" (Augustine, *Contra Academicos* III, xix, 42). Elsewhere Augustine makes the following observation: "The utterance of Plato, the most pure and bright in all philosophy, scattering the clouds of error, has shone forth most of all in Plotinus who has been deemed so like his master one might think them contemporaries if the length of time between them did not compel us to say that in Plotinus Plato lived again" (Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, III, xviii, 41).

Plotinus' doctrine of the One influenced Augustine's formulation of the concept of the 'Godhead', which for him is the principle of the unity of God. For Augustine, the idea "God" did not directly mean Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; rather it meant the notion of the Godhead or essence (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 1:8:15). For Augustine, Godhead or essence is completely simple and without multiplicipty. Thus Augustine also emphasises the 'One' described by him as Godhead or essence as the highest principle.

Having given prominence to essence, the Persons for Augustine existed only relatively to each other. In other words, the υποςταςεις were concretized as Persons and distinguished from each other only by their relations with each other. And so, for Augustine, the Father is personally concrete and distinguished from the Son because the Person of the Father is the cause of the Person of the Son by the act of eternal generation. The Father is also the cause of the Holy Spirit by the act of eternal spiration. Augustine saw two kinds of relations (Father-Son and Spirator-Spirit) which distinguish Father and Son from each other and Father and Spirit from each other. What he saw as being the problem was how the Holy Spirit was to be distinguished from the Son. In answer to this problem, Augustine explained that the Holy Spirit is caused by the Father as well as by the Son. (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5:6, 8, 14, 15).[71]

Once Augustine had accepted *substantia,* the grammatical term 'underlying' or 'lying below', and thus the theological term 'Godhead' as the beginning point of the Trinitarian debate, he laid a foundation firmly rooted in neo-Platonic reasoning, a foundation which theologians coming from his tradition would use to argue that God is his essence and in the process fail to give due prominence to the Persons of the Trinity. This is what we see happening in the thought of Boethius, in the works of the Christian apologetes against the Muslims, and in the works of Thomas Aquinas.

[71] Augustine seems to suggest that to call these subsistent relations person is a mere linguistic usage. In his own words, we can talk of persons "so that we not be altogether silent when asked what three, while we confess that they are three" (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 5:10).

3.3 The Contributions of Boethius

Medieval theology modified the Augustinian usage of *substantia* and brought it into line with the latest developments in Neo-Platonism. The person who has been credited with this modification is Boethius. Medieval thought, it should be remembered, was taking place at a time when it was widely believed that there was something in Greek thought, and in Aristotle in particular, that could provide a new lease of life and a true consolation to the depressed medievals. This context was clearly set in the works of Boethius, who was by far the most prolific and influential scholar of the Middle Ages.

Boethius, described as "the founder of the middle ages" (O'Daly, 1991:15) or simply as " the last of the Romans, first of the scholastics" (Marsh, 1994:142), and equipped with a thorough grasp of Plato and Aristotle, gave an entirely new direction to the medievals' poetry, music, theology, education, mathematics, classical philosophy and logics (O'Daly, 1991:8-14). He saw his task as developing and extending Greek science and thought to embrace the latest developments where they did not advance beyond Porphry and his predecessors. Patch explains that "... his manuscripts were copied in comparative abundance. No properly equipped library was without one or more of his works ... what he wrote furnished the basis for education in various subjects in the schools and universities during the many centuries until the Renaissance" (Patch, 1935:21).

Boethius sought to reinterpret the Augustinian being of God who is Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit within the infrastructure of the concept of 'form'. Boethius' understanding of 'form', however, indicates that he intended to use the concept not in its Platonic nuance but in its Aristotelian reinterpretation. Consequently, by talking of 'form', Boethius is not merely referring to an independently existing real thing or entity as the concept is understood in Plato (Ryle, 1967:322), but rather, like Aristotle, he takes form as signifying 'universals' made in a particular way. This understanding of the concept of 'form' allows him to struggle with how the particular 'universal' in question stands in relation to the 'concrete individual thing' (Kerferd, 1967:159 cf Boethius, *Theol. tract*:5,7). In other words, he poses the question: How is the 'universal' in question presented concretely? What is the essence of the 'universal' when it is presented concretely? This kind of quest is what is called a search for

'what is' in Aristotelian thought (Kerferd, 1967:159).

Boethius' Aristotelian thought on 'form' concludes that God is his 'essence' and that 'essence' is the 'form' he has achieved—the divine substance. This divine substance or divine nature, explains Boethius, is "... form without matter, and is therefore One, and its own essence" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:11). Consequently, argues Boethius,

> ... if God be predicated thrice of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, the threefold predication does not result in plural number. The risk of that, as has been said, attends only on those who distinguish them according to merit. But Catholic Christians allowing no difference of merit in God, assuming him to be Pure Form and believing him to be nothing else than his own essence, rightly regard the statement "the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and this Trinity is one God", not an enumeration of different things but as a reiteration of one and the same thing, like the statement "blade and brand are one sword" or "sun, sun, and sun are one sun" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:15).

And so *'o theos*, in the thought of Boethius, is what is universal to the three *personae. 'O theos* in this scheme of things is a 'pure form', his 'own essence'. Elsewhere he says clearly that "when we say God, we. .. denote a substance; a substance that is supersubstantial" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:17, 35).

The three Persons in the Boethian theology are but individual concrete expressions of the universal (the essence or substance) with the same attributes as what is universal. Boethius articulates this point thoroughly in the following words:

> Everything that is said of the Divine substance must be common to the Three, and we can recognize what predicates may be affirmed of the substance of the godhead by this sign, that all those which are affirmed of it may also be affirmed severally of the Three combined into one. For instance if we say "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God," then Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God. If then their one godhead is one substance, the name of God may with right be predicated substantially of the Divinity.
> Similarly the Father is truth, the Son is truth, and the Holy Spirit is truth. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three truths, but one truth. If then they are one substance and one truth, truth must of necessity be a substantial predicate. So Goodness, Immutability, Omnipotence and all other predicates which we apply to the persons singly and collectively are plainly substantial predicates (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:35).

Here we are seeing the beginnings of the Aristotelian application of the notion of properties of a substance divided into *essential* and *accidental* being applied to God. Boethius would

apply the divine attributes to the 'Godhead', for it is there where the divine substance lies. In other words, God is simple and undifferentiated. He and his Substance or essence are one and the same. He is his own essence, and the divine essence cannot be "distinguished either by accidents or by substantial differences belonging to a substrate" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:13). In the late Middle Ages, as we shall see, the divine persons would be discussed merely as attributes.

Boethius traces the concept of 'person' from the idea of 'mask'. He says that the word "... person seems to be borrowed from a different source, namely from the masks which in comedies and tragedies used to signify different subjects of representation" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:86f.). The Greeks called these 'persons' or 'masks' προςοπα and the Latins called them *personae* (Boethius, *Theol. tract*:87; see also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q 29, art. 3). It is clear that this understanding of 'person' influences Boethius' conclusion on the matter of the simplicity of God. What is original of Boethius' view of the concept of 'person' is that he sees a substance with intelligence behind the 'mask'.

Boethius' own definition of 'person' would therefore be "individual subsistence of a rational nature" (Boethius, *Theol. tract*: 85). Put in another way, Boethius understands 'person' as an individual nature endowed with rationality and consciousness. Two things stand out in this definition of person. The first issue has to do with thinking, self-consciousness or simply rationality. To be a person is to be able to think, to be self-conscious, to be rational. The second issue arises from the term 'individual nature'. The way Boethius uses this term indicates that he intends true personhood to arise from one's individualistic isolation from others. For Boethius, all persons are individual, but only rational individuals are persons. This way of understanding person is strange particularly to the patristic thought which would not pose the question of one's freedom from one's very existence or what is common to human nature (Zizioulas, 1995:54). Zizioulas has noted that in the entire "history of the Western thought the equation of person with the thinking, self-conscious individual has become the highest concept in anthropology" (Zizioulas, 1995:58).[72] The 'God as Subject'

[72] Boethius' definition of person as "individual subsistence of a rational nature" marks the beginning of the philosophical use of the term person (see Webb, 1920:54). Between "rationality" and "individuality" there has been a remarkable oscillation of opinions. The notable scholars who have contributed to these debates include

which is the content of the next chapter takes its perspective from the Boethian concept of person.

3.4 The Influence of Islam and Judaism in the Middle Ages

The doctrine of the Trinity beyond Boethius cannot be discussed without looking at the dynamics introduced by the contact between Christianity and the new faith Islam on the one hand and by the continued interaction with Judaism on the other hand. In Boethius, we have seen the doctrine of God discussed entirely in terms of substance. Later during the Enlightenment, the trend would change and the discussions would converge on the idea of Personality.

The invasion of Islam and its encounter with Christianity gave reason for the Christian faith to reformulate its thought in ways that could effectively counteract the K*alam*[73] of the Muslim theologians. With the continued interaction between the Christian thought and the Muslim *Kalam*, the Jewish-Christian debates on the problem of monotheism also got resuscitated once again and both Judaism and Islam this time joined hands and defined "one-ness or unity of God as having to do with his non-material and therefore non-composite and non-divisible essence" (Skarsaune, 1957:348). This comes very close to the position of the Christian Latin thinkers in the West, who by that time saw the one-ness of God as a common substance but emphasised 'the three essential attributes' which belong by necessity to the substance and therefore are one with it.

The Christian-Muslim debates dating from the early Middle Ages indicate that the Oriental Christian apologists, using Syriac or Arabic as their primary language, tried to explain to the Muslims the concept of the Triune God using the attributes ascribed to Allah in the Koran (Wolfson, 1956:1-18). Different Christian apologists operating from Neo-Platonic metaphysics chose different attributes as their starting point. The early approach identified the being of God with the Father, and then the Son and the Spirit merely became his

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Lotze, Bosanquet, Descartes, Locke and Kant.

[73] *Kalam* is a rationalistic philosophical theology developed by the Muslim theologians in the ninth century applying the categories of Aristotle to the Arabic thought. A standard monograph on this is HA Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (London, 1976).

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attributes. This approach is seen in the Al Kindi's *Apology*, which introduces Wisdom and Knowledge (alternatively Life and Knowledge), as the two essential attributes that together with the divine substance make a Trinity (Newman, 1993:419,420).

Also noteworthy are instances where the Father is also associated with one divine attribute. For example, by 1150-1200, two Muslim works (*Trinitizing the Unity* and *The Book of the Existing World*) explain that the Oriental Arabic Christians taught that God's essence has the three attributes of Power (the Father), Knowledge (the Son), and Will (the Holy Spirit) (see Skarsaune, 1957:343). There are two reasons why the Christian polemicists chose these attributes. In the first place, the polemicists had their Christian heritage which taught the three *hypostaseis* doctrine, which is really shorthand for the divine being as the common substance underlying the 'three essential attributes'. Consequently they wanted to see how this doctrine could in actual fact square with the Muslim understanding of God formulated in Aristotelian terms. And secondly, the Christian polemicists had noticed that although the Muslim *Kalam* recognises that God had other names, the triad (power, knowledge, and will) still remained central in that theological tradition. The centrality of the triad was based on the understanding that power, knowledge and will are "the source of all other names ... the faculty of power, for example, is the source of names such as the Mighty, the Strong ... while the faculty of will is the source of such names as the Forgiving, the Consenting" (Burman, 1994:165).

The response of the Muslims and the Jews to this kind of polemics is interesting. The Kalamic School of the Mutazilites,[74] for example denied altogether the existence of attributes in God (Wolfson, 1976:18,19; 132-143). However, the dominant Muslim group in the school of Asharism (Nasr, 1973:642) and the Jews accepted the existence of the attributes, but did not see how any of the attributes could ever exist as Trinitarian *personae.* For instance,

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[74] Mutazilites derive from the Arabic *Mutazilah,* the first Islamic systematic theological school that was of tremendous influence in the Islamic world for many centuries. The Mutazilites saw their call as preserving the divine unity. However in pursuing this task, it chose as Nasr explains; "a rationalistic interpretation of the Divinity which tended to view God more as a philosophical abstraction than as a reality who is the fountainhead of the revealed religion" (Nasr, 1973:641). Mutazilism was challenged at the end of the ninth century by Asharism, an alternative systematic theological school which "opposed the rationalistic tendencies of the Mutazilites, sought to re-establish the concrete presence of God by charting a middle course between 'tashbih' and 'tanzih' or by giving anthropomorphic qualities to God on the one hand, and abstracting all qualities from him on the other hand" (ibid.:642).

Joseph ben Shem Tov, a Jew writing during the High Middle Ages, recognises that the three attributes in the Deity (power, wisdom, and will) that the Christian apologists espouse, correspond with the Jewish philosopher Hasdai's conclusion that God has the three essential attributes of power, wisdom and will (Lasker, 1977:70; cf Wolfson, 1976:112,113). The Jews, however, differed from the Christians when they recognised that the Christians did not use the concept of the attributes in the same way. One Jewish polemicist, Judah Arye de Modena, makes this point very clear:

> One cannot deny that God knows and intellectually cognizes Himself and generates from this an intellectually cognized object which he loves. Now the knower is the Father, what is generated from his intellectual cognition is the Son, and His love for it is the Holy Spirit. None of these three things, His cognition, the result of His cognition, and His love, are accidental to God as they are to man, nor are they external to Him. They are essential to the Godhead, and therefore he is one in His substance and His three attributes which they call *personae*. ... When however they come and say that these three attributes are distinct, and external to him, and go so far as to say that one of them can do or become something which the other ones will not do or become, e.g. their statement that the Son became incarnate, but not the Father or the Holy Spirit, then this is the difference which completely divides our opinion from theirs (Judah Arye de Modena quoted according to Lasker, 1977:81,82).

The Muslims in the Asharism theological camp, which were the dominant group by the time of High Middle Ages (Nasr, 1973:641-42), agreed with the Jewish critique of the Christians. They too did not see how the attributes could exist as *personae*. Their reason for rejecting the Christian stand was not theological however, it was their understanding of the Neo-Platonic concepts of essence and attributes (Skarsaune, 1957:347). According to the Neo-Platonic doctrines of essence and attributes, plurality presupposes materiality of the underlying substance (Aristotle, *Metaph*. XII.8.1074A). Since God is not material, he cannot be said to be plural. In the course of these Christian-Muslim-Judaism exchanges, the Muslim thinkers of the time understood God in two distinct senses. On the one hand they saw the one-ness or unity of God in purely abstract terms. One-ness of God, according to this system, had to do with "his *non-material* and therefore non-composite and non-divisible essence" (Skarsaune, 1957:348). On the other hand, however, they saw God as a reality and attached to him anthropomorphic qualities that were not to be understood as *personae*.

Later in the Middle Ages, the Christian authors in the Latin West would take over much of the arguments posited earlier by the Oriental Arabic Christian polemicists, who saw the one-ness of God as a common substance with three essential attributes which, by necessity belong

to the substance and are therefore one with it (Lasker, 1977:13-20). The method of the Oriental Arabic Christians would make sense in the West by around 1 000 AD, because by that time Aristotle's *Categories* had been rediscovered in the Latin West (Southern, 1990:48) and now the Latin West too had a ready intellectual culture within which it could tackle the persistent substance-attributes problem. Some of the early Latin West Christian thinkers who used the Oriental Arabic Christian polemicists' style of constructing the doctrine of the Trinity, employed the substance-attributes model, are William of Conches (d. 1145) and Peter Abelard (1079-1142). In these thinkers we see the triad Father = *potentia*, Son = *sapientia*, and Spirit = *voluntas* (in the case of William) and *benignitas* (in Abelard). The same triad occurs in Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141), except that this time more flexibility is accorded the Holy Spirit: *bonitas sive benignitas, amor, voluntas* (Lasker, 1977:63,64,68,207, n.177). A similar trend is noticeable in the works of Anselm.

Anselm followed Boethius and preferred to discuss God within the framework of 'being' (Kaiser, 1982:96). Like Boethius, Anselm's views were thus unbalanced and tilted towards accenting the plausibility of the Aristotelian dialectic over and above the historical ideas revealed in the Scripture. Anselm's method of arriving at the knowledge of God went as follows:

> ... we have a hierarchy of being, the apex or limiting term of which is God. In one sense, the limiting term is not just another member of the hierarchy; so we may say that God is not a being. In another sense, however, God is the only real member of the hierarchy, in as much as all the others derive their existence from him; so we may also say that he is the only truly existing being. On balance, then, it is best to call him 'Supreme Being' (*summa essentia*) in order to express both the continuity and the discontinuity between him and all the created beings. Similarly he is the Supreme Life, Supreme Wisdom, and supremely whatever else it is better to be than not to be (Kaiser, 1982:87)

3.5 The Contribution of Thomas Aquinas

The understanding of Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of the Latin West's doctrine of God cannot be abstracted from the philosophical and theological developments that were taking place in the Latin West of the High Middle Ages. Already we have talked of the renewed interest in Aristotle from the time of Boethius until 1 000 AD. Although he was a theologian,

it is common knowledge that Aquinas' understanding of Aristotle is not inferior to that of Averros and Maimonides'; the great Muslim and Jewish Aristotelians (Henle, 1956:7). But besides the renewed interest in Aristotle, there was also the on-going interaction between the three monotheistic faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The significance of Aquinas would therefore be how he would explain his unique faith (Catholic faith) in the light of his Aristotelian frame of thought in a context that already had tremendous interest in Aristotle. What is of particular interest to us here is his long journey through the complex Aristotelian attributes-essence problem that stops at the point where he of necessity formulated the doctrine of the economic-immanent Trinity.

Aquinas begins his investigation into the nature of God by radically modifying the Aristotelian conception of simplicity of substance. Theologians and philosophers such as Augustine and Boethius had taught that primary substances are "(i) self-subsistent entities which are (ii) impredictable subjects of predication (or bearers of qualities), (iii) capable of persistence through qualitative change, and (iv) in a special way unitary or simple" (Lowe, 1988:258). However, in the sixth chapter of his *On Being and Essence,* Aquinas separates substance into three distinct categories: divine, spiritual, and material[75]. Aquinas sees the spiritual and the material categories as finite beings falling within the same logical genus as both the created spirits and bodies have some aspects in common. The divine substance, however, is of an entirely different nature from that of bodies and of created spirits. There is only one divine substance, the identity of which is God (Aquinas, *On Being,* ch.6). By saying that the identity of the divine substance is God, Aquinas is appealing to the Aristotelian doctrine of the simplicity of substances: no substance consists of substances, or to put it in another way, "the substance of a thing is that which is peculiar to it" (Aristotle, *Metaph.*1038b 9(1)(a)). In this particular case the divine substance is peculiar to God.

[75] This division allows Aquinas to deal with the theological problem brought about by the existence of spiritual beings like angels, which he includes in his second category, and the reality of nature of man seen against the background of the spiritual reality on the one hand and the rest of the created world on the other hand. For Aquinas, man is a special case because he has a soul, but at the same time he has an animal body. Whereas Aristotle viewed man in a naturalistic way (Aristotle assumes that all substances are material) and therefore put man in the same plane as animals, Aquinas saw man as possessing a soul united with the animal body; and the human soul, being a spiritual substance, is capable of disembodied existence (see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a, xxix, 3-4 cf Aristotle, *De Anima*)

The argument of Aquinas that the divine substance is God is further buttressed by the Aristotelian connection between 'substance' and 'form'. We have seen what 'substance' is (see Lowe, 1988:258). However, like Boethius, Aquinas understands 'form' as the way in which primary substances are made (see Ryle, 1967:322). Based on this understanding of the concept of 'form', Lamont explains the theory that Aquinas posits in the following words:

> ... all there is to material things is their forms and the matter that composes them. Since their matter is the only feature that material things possess besides their form, it can only be their matter that makes them different from their forms. If a thing is immaterial [and God is immaterial], there is no feature of it that can make it different from their forms. To put it crudely and inaccurately, if you subtract the matter, all you will have left is the form. But if immaterial things do not differ from their forms, they must be identical with their forms. There is no intermediate state between being identical with something and not being identical with it; immaterial things thus are their forms, are forms subsisting on their own. But God as has been established, is an immaterial being. Since God is immaterial, he is identical with his form (Lamont, 1997:526).

Why is Aquinas introducing the problem of 'form' in his discussion? The simple and most obvious reason is that the relationship between *matter* and *form* is the context within which the Aristotelian thought deals with the problem of identity (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, books Z and H, cf Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 1a, xxix, 3-4). For Aristotle, primary substances are made of something, their 'matter'. The manner in which they are made of this 'matter' is their 'form'. Aquinas wants to make it clear that God is a 'primary substance' although he is not made of 'matter'; he is 'made' of divine substance, and that divine substance is an immaterial being entirely different in nature from that of bodies or even of created spirits. Since the divine substance is immaterial and completely other, we must locate God's identity not in what we can know of the divine substance, but in the divine 'form', since the immaterial divine substance is organised in such-and-such a way that it does not connote any relationship to anything in any way other than to God.

Having dealt with the problem of 'substance', 'matter' and 'form', Aquinas now turns his attention to the issue of 'essence'. Aristotle deals with the issue of essence at length in his *Metaphysics* book Z. In this document, Aristotle develops two related ideas. In the first place, he raised the notion that substances persist through qualitative change. This belief led

him to the second issue, namely that properties of substances divide into the essential and the accidental. EJ Lowe believes that the Aristotelian doctrine of essence is best captured in the relationship between the notion that matter persists through qualitative change and the idea that substance can be divided into the essential and the accidental. Essence understood, in these terms, argues Lowe, logically leads to the view that "the *essential* properties of a substance (collectively constituting its *essence*) are those which, by its very nature, it cannot cease to have without thereby ceasing to be (so that their loss or gain involves a *substantial* change); loss or gain of an accident in a substance, on the other hand, constitutes only qualitative change" (Lowe, 1988:258). Therefore by raising the problem of 'essence' in the context of the divine substance, one in effect brings to surface the question: What is the essential property of the divine substance? In other words: Why is *this* substance God? The divine substance is God because the essence of God is present in the substance (Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 1041a 4). And what is the essence of God? To this question, Aquinas' answer is existence (Aquinas, *On being,* ch.6).

What does Aquinas mean by saying that the essence of the divine substance is 'existence'? By this statement, Aquinas seems to be positing the view that God is a necessary being in whose very nature it is to exist. His existence cannot depend on anything external, rather it is necessary as that is his nature. Existence is he and he is existence. In other words, it is not the case that God could have failed to have existence; His existence is his essence. God is 'He Who Is' (Qui est), and 'He Who Is' is the most proper name for God (Aquinas, *Summa theologica,* I, 13, II; cf *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I ch.22).

According to Aquinas, although 'essence' and 'existence' are identical in God, the human mind cannot comprehend this identity, since the divine 'essence' cannot be known as it is in itself. In the thought of Aquinas, man cannot comprehend the divine essence because God is an immaterial being of an entirely different nature. However, we can comprehend the statement, 'God exists' (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 86-88; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I ch. 3). We arrive at the knowledge that he exists, not through his essence, but through his effects (ibid., I ch 11; cf I *Distinctio* 3 q 1:a.2).

The final explanation of the relationship of 'essence' and 'existence' is found in Aquinas' cosmological proofs of God. The first starts from movement in the world and arrives at a concept of the *primum movens* [first cause of movement] (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 2, a. 3). The second proceeds from effects in the world and arrives at the concept of the *causa prima* [first cause of change](ibid.). The third starts from the potential being of all things and arrives at the concept of the *ens per se necessarium* [something which must be] (ibid.). The fourth begins with the gradation of beings in the world and arrives at the concept of the *maxime ens* [something which causes in all other things their being](ibid.). Finally, the fifth starts from the order of the world and arrives at the concept of someone with the highest *intellectus* (ibid.). To these five definitions Aquinas adds in each case:'*et hoc dicimus Deum*'- [and this we call God]

These proofs allowed Aquinas to understand the divine nature as the moving, causing, necessary, pure and intelligent Being. Thus God, as essence, has become conceivable as the highest substance. God is the highest substance, or in the words of Aquinas, "He [God] is supremely being ... since he is Being itself". The "name He Who Is, is the most proper name of God ... for it does not signify some form, but being itself" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. XI, a. 4; q XIII, a. 11). To God who is thus named can be predicated such attributes as almighty, omnipresent, omniscient, unchanging, infinite, and incomprehensible. As Berkhof has observed, these "omni-, un-, and in-, words" have dominated the doctrine of God for centuries because they gave expression to both the exaltedness and the firmness that people sought to find in God (Berkhof, 1985:93).

After Aquinas has discussed the existence and attributes of God under the rubric of what has become known in theological circles as *De Deo Uno,* the Godhead as the nature common to the three persons (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qs. 1 - 26), he turns to the Trinity --*De Deo Trino* (ibid.:qs. 27 - 43). This approach, which separates the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity, has in a way been considered the universal standard. Rahner argues that "one cannot however appeal to tradition for the now standard division and order of the two treatises. It only came into general use since the *Sententia* of Peter Lombard were replaced by the *Summa* of St Thomas" (Rahner, TI, IV:83).

Aquinas says: "As the Godhead is God, so the divine paternity is God the Father, who is a divine Person" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, art. 4). What is interesting, however, is Aquinas' understanding of 'divine Person'. For him, the 'divine Person' signifies a relationship subsisting in the divine essence, "person means relation" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 29, art. 4). This is clearly a standard Augustinian position. And so as far as Aquinas is concerned, a 'divine Person' is actually an internal relationship within the simple divine essence, the Godhead.

The Father is the 'principle', not from a 'principle'. Clearly, Aquinas uses the concept 'principle' to signify 'that whence another proceeds" (ibid.:, q. 33, art. 1 & 4), thus paternity (ibid, art 2). Aquinas prefers to discuss the Son as Word. The Son alone is called the Word of God, (ibid.:q 34, art. 2), he proceeds from God and this procession is called generation (ibid.:q. 27, art. 2). "Word implies relation to creatures. For God, by knowing Himself knows every creature ... because God by one act understands Himself and all things, His one only Word is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creatures" (ibid., q. 34, art 3). Turning to the Holy Spirit, Aquinas explains that the Holy Spirit is the procession of "love in God" (ibid., q. 27, art. 4). This position is similar to what Augustine had taught. In the words of Augustine, "Scripture teaches us that he is the Spirit neither of the Father alone, nor of the Son alone, but of both; and so his being suggests to us that mutual love by which Father and Son love each other" (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15:17:27; cf 6:5:7). The way this procession of love is distinguished from the 'other procession' is what Aquinas calls "relations of opposition".

> It must be said that the Holy Spirit is from the Son. For if the Spirit were not from the Son, he could in a way be personally distinguished from Him. ... For it cannot be said that the divine Persons are distinguished from each other in any absolute sense; for it would follow that there would not be one essence of the three persons since everything that is spoken of God in an absolute sense, belongs to the unity of essence. Therefore it must be said that the divine persons are distinguished from each other only by the relations. Now the relations cannot distinguish the Persons unless they are relations of opposition. This appears from the fact that the Father has two relationships; by one of these he is related to the Son, by the other to the Holy Spirit. But these two relationships [generation and spiration] are not relations of opposition [to each other], and therefore they do not make two Persons, but belong only to the one Person of the Father. So if in the Son and the Holy Spirit there were two relations

> only, by which each of them was related to the Father, these relations would not be relations of opposition between Son and Spirit. .... It would follow from this that since the Person of the Father is one, therefore the Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit would be one Person, because their two relations of opposition [Sonship and Spirithood] would only be with the Father's two relations [generation and spiration]. But this is heretical; it destroys faith in the Trinity. Therefore the Son and the Holy Spirit must be related to each other by relations of opposition. Now there cannot be in God any relations opposed to each other, except relations of origin.... And opposite relations of origin are to be understood as of a *principle*, and of what is *from the principle*. Therefore it is necessary to say that either the Son is from the Holy Ghost; which no one says; or that the Holy Spirit is from the Son, as we confess (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I q. 36, art. 2).

Aquinas' image of God is the dominant position within modern Catholicism. Main-line Protestantism also identifies with Aquinas' way of understanding God, as is clearly evident in the Belgic Confession. As Berkhof has well noted, the Belgic Confession Article I "... offers a definition of God by means of abstract omni- and in- words, and it is only from Article 17 onward that the love of Christ comes to be central - without however allowing this confession to modify the definition of God given in Article I" (Berkhof, 1985:94). This situation results from viewing God more in the context of *quid sit*, as a 'being' and obviously as contemplated within an abstract framework, rather than from seeing him as he is revealed in the Scripture.

3.6 Basic Characteristics of 'God as Essence'

3.6.1 Puts emphasis on the Transcendence of God

God perceived within an abstract framework is inapproachable. God understood according to this model is seen as so simple and undifferentiated that not much thought is given to the fact that, in his desire to be known, God has in fact revealed himself as 'One' yet 'Three'. Barth already gave a detailed analysis of what it means by God revealing Himself in Jesus Christ in his CD II/1, part IV:'The Reality of God' (Chapters 28-31). In chapter 28 Barth defines God as the one who loves in freedom (ibid:257-321). Elsewhere, Barth says

> Who God is and what is to be divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed himself ... we may believe that God can and must only be absolute in

> contrast to all that is relative, exalted in contrast to all that is lowly, active in contrast to all suffering, inviolable in contrast to all temptation, transcendent in contrast to all immanence, and therefore divine in contrast to everything human, in short that [God] can and must be only the 'wholly other'. But such beliefs are shown to be quite untenable, corrupt, and pagan, by the fact that God does in fact be and do this in Jesus Christ (Barth, CD IV/1:186).

Berkhof rightly sees in these thoughts a crucial theological factor that provides the much-needed bridge between the theological concepts of transcendence and immanence or, as he calls it, 'condescendence'. God who loves in freedom is an involved God and is never transcendent in an absolute sense of the word. In Berkhof's own words, "transcendence is not abstracted from condescension as was traditionally done, nor opposed to it as is in Luther. Transcendence realises itself in condescension. Revelation is fully disclosure and actualization of essence" (Berkhof, 1979:110). This has meant for Berkhof and other 'Divinity as Absolute Subject' theologians that the traditional manner of speaking about God taken from the early reinterpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity be reworked so that the Christian doctrine of God may reflect the one God known to us through the Son and the Holy Spirit (see ibid:105-147). This reworking of the traditional way of speaking about God involves balancing transcendence and condescendence, unity and particularity, for particularity helps us to see the unity in its proper perspective and condescendence focuses our attention on transcendence. The result of such a picture of God should be in a theology which understands, as Migliore has explained, that

> ... the unity of the triune God is not a mere mathematical oneness but a living unity which includes diversity; the steadfastness of the triune God is not a dead immutability but a dynamic constancy of character and purpose that includes movement and change; the power of the triune God is not raw omnipotence but the sovereignty of love that is incomparably strong even in weakness; the grace of the triune God is righteous and the righteousness of this God is gracious; the omniscience of the triune God is not trivial "know-it -all" but the deep wisdom of God that includes the foolishness of the cross (Migliore, 1991:74)

3.6.2 Indicates transition from the economic Trinity to the immanent Trinity.

The doctrine of God we see during the Middle Ages and the Scholastic period is that which has clearly moved from the Trinity of experience described in other terms as the economic or dispensational Trinity, to the essential, immanent or ontological Trinity. The major motivation of the Christian thinkers of this time seems to be how to bring the Aristotelian

categories within the precincts of Christian thought. It is not surprising, therefore, that Harnack could describe the doctrine of the Trinity formulated during this general period as "the high school of logic and dialectic" (Harnack, 1910:183). Due to the pressure to conform to the Aristotelian logic and dialectic, the doctrines of God formulated during this time are clearly void of the concreteness of the divine persons we meet in the pages of the Scripture.

Thus, instead of meeting Jesus, His Father, and the Holy Spirit, in distinct but inter-related ways, we meet ' three pure relations' which in reality cannot be described by the term person (Augustine), or three *upostaseis*, each of whom is individually described as 'substance of a rational nature' (Boethius). The one God is no longer Yahweh, but 'Pure Form', 'Being', or 'Essence' explained in tight Aristotelian logic. In a sense, concern for the regulation of the theological language has become the primary concern and the language must measure up to the requirements of the intellectual culture within which the conversation takes place. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the theological language suiting the requirements of the context within which the theological conversation is taking place. What is wrong, however, is when the emphasis is no longer theology but philosophy; when what matters is not the truth *per se* but the tight logic which by itself is merely a means. This twist in emphasis is unfortunate and strange to those who have experienced God and known Him personally.

3.6.3 Severes the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Context of the Trinity

In his essay, "Christology and the Trinitarian Thought", Christoph Schwöbel argues that modern Christology is in a state of crisis. The crisis has to do with the methodological principles seen in three sets of antimonies. The first antimony is whether Christ is to be understood "from above, from below, from the historical reality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, or from the ultimate being of God". The second antimony has to do with what has been called 'the ugly broad ditch' that separates the present from the past. The main problem here is whether the Christological methodology is to proceed from the historical Jesus or from the modern Christian experience of faith. The last and the final antimony is whether the Christological question focuses either on his being or his significance (see Schwöbel, 1975:113-119). However, the question is: How did these antimonies arise? What is responsible for them? Many reasons could account for the rise of these antimonies. In the

thought of Schwöbel, the antimonies are a result of neglect of trinitarian logic in Christological formulations (Schwöbel, 1975:120). The seeds of this neglect are already present in Aquinas, who was visibly uneasy with the speculative tradition of the construction of the doctrine of the Trinity and as a result he constantly moved between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity (see Placher, 1996:166). The problem with Aquinas' methodology is that it has given us a theological heritage that sees the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit without seeing the three in the context of the Trinity.

3.6.4 Describes a Deity which is one simple impersonal Being

Augustine, as we have seen, was clearly uneasy with the idea of the divine Persons. For him the divine essence was the crucial factor and Persons according to that scheme are merely relations within that essence. For Augustine, as is the case with Aquinas as well, "relations take a secondary place to the unity and are understood logically and not ontologically" (Thompson, 1994:129). Because of this situation, Gunton observes that Augustine cannot "make claims about the being of particular persons, who, because they lack distinguishable identity tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God" (Gunton, 1991:42). Of course, the divine Persons have relations, but they cannot simply be reduced to relations. Moreover, a relation must have concrete objective content, but the Augustinian relations lack this, instead what we see is relation contrasted to the other two, what Aquinas would call relations of opposition. The Holy Spirit in Augustine, as in Aquinas, is the mutual love of Father and Son. The Spirit is thus not given due concreteness, and moreover, how the Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son is not argued from either the perspective of the economy or from the God's involvement with the eschaton (Gunton, 1991:51).

Boethius, articulating Augustine for his audience, who lived only a few generations from Augustine, understood the idea of three Persons as but a reiteration of one and the same thing, much like the statement "'blade, and brand, are one sword' or 'sun, sun and sun are one sun'" (Boethius, 1926:15). We see a similar commitment in the context of the Christian-Muslim-Jewish debates of the Middle Ages.

The debates among the Christian-Muslim-Jewish of the Middle Ages indicate that the Christian apologists of the time gave priority to the divine unity and wished to explain the plurality in terms of attributes. The issue the Christians of the time focused on is what the three monotheistic faiths of the Old Testament had in common, rather than how the Christian faith is distinct from the other two. At the end of the day, the eagerness of the Christian thinkers to prove that the Christian faith was monotheistic by the use of the Aristotelian concept of substance and the doctrine of attributes only resulted in the Christian thinkers coming up with a deity which is one simple undiversified being, more or less like the Muslim Allah or the God of the medieval Jewish thinkers. The Aristotelian concept of substance is clearly incapable of providing a structure for formulating diversity in deity. As Skarsaune has noted, there is no known Christian thinker who tried to defend the Aristotelian formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity without finding themselves in troubled waters (Skarsaune, 1957:353).

3.7 Conclusion

The 'God as essence' model of the Trinity is clearly using the infrastructure of Neo-Platonism to reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine's idea of 'Godhead' was influenced by Plotinus' concept of the 'One' as the highest principle. Boethius perfected Augustine's notion of 'Godhead' for the Middle Ages. There is no doubt that the theology of Aquinas has continued to be of tremendous influence in the Church. It should be noted, however, that Aquinas followed the path Augustine blazed and Boethius improved.

The basic characteristics of 'God as essence' we noticed in this chapter can partly be explained by the nature of the metaphysics chosen by Augustine, Boethius and Aquinas. For these thinkers, Neo-Platonism was an appropriate intellectual system of reinterpreting the Christian orthodoxy. Boethius wanted to prove to his readers that the Aristotelian ontology was the appropriate medium of articulating reality. Other Middle Age and Scholastic theologians, such as Benedict of Aniane, John Scotus Erigna, Anselm, Abelard, and Albertus Magnus, were all derailed by their respective commitment to the Aristotelian description of being. The question that we must pose here is: Do we have to use Neo-Platonic infrastructure in reinterpreting the Christian view of God, or are there other options? Perhaps, as Thompson once asked: "... is it not possible to begin with one personal God who is at one and the same

time personally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Unity and threeness are both equally ultimate in the Trinity" (Thompson, 1994:130).

4 God as an absolute Subject

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with 'God as an absolute subject' paradigm of formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. The key theologians associated with the position of 'God as an absolute subject' are Barth and Rahner. Although both Barth and Rahner[76] are not widely used within the African theological circles, their notion of 'God as an absolute subject' could be very significant to the traditional Africa which already understands God as a being that is both 'Supreme' and 'Personal'.[77]

4.2 The Beginnings of 'Self-Consciousness'

The context of 'God as an absolute Subject' reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity is the rise of the eighteenth century Enlightenment as a cultural period in Western society and the general coldness to Plato and Aristotle which provided the impetus for an alternative model of constructing reality[78]. The medieval cosmology was patterned as below (Bosch, 1991:263):

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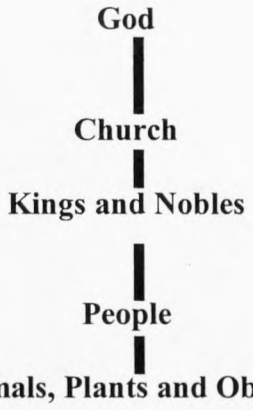
[76] Within the African Christian situation, Barth is known as a neo-Orthodox theologian and he is therefore not read either by the African liberals or the Evangelicals, who together form the largest share of the African Protestantism involved in formal theology. Rahner is still regarded as a prodigal son within Catholicism and he is little known within African protestant circles.

[77] See Part 3 of this research, particularly the contributions of Prof. JS Mbiti, Prof. B Idowu, and Prof GM Setiloane.

[78] Note that the 'coldness to Plato and Aristotle' referred to here does not mean that Platonism died in the West prior to the rise of Idealism. Platonism has never died in the West, since if it did we would not have talked here of the 'God as Essence'. In fact, other branches of philosophy believe "... that modern philosophy has done little else than write footnotes to the Greek" (Berkhof, 1985:58). What happened with the rise of Philosophical Idealism was the coming into the scene of an alternative or a rival pattern of constructing reality hitherto unknown to the Western mind.



Gradually, but without any conscious awareness of what was in fact unfolding, some sections of Western society moved away from this cosmology, and went through a paradigmatic change so that by the time of Bacon and Descartes, radical anthropocentrism was deeply entrenched and philosophy in these sections no longer addressed substance, essence, or form as the basis of existence or 'first cause without being caused'; rather, it addressed 'ideas' and the connection between the reality of the 'ideas' as such and the subject 'I' who holds the 'ideas'.

This was a complete paradigmatic change: a movement away from the method which philosophy had hitherto employed to an entirely new way of constructing reality. This new way of looking at reality became known as Idealism. Idealism concerned itself primarily with 'ideas' and in a derivative sense with what it considered 'ideal'. In this context, idea meant "... any and every object of which any human mind is at any time aware" (Hoernle, 1924:3). This change to ideas not only meant change to focus on the "... 'copies' in the mind of objects outside" (Hoernle, 1924:34), but it also meant positing a theory of knowledge in which the subject is sure of the existence of the self, the 'I'; the object of consciousness (the 'idea'); and consciousness[79] itself. This phenomenon is what Idealist philosophy calls 'self-consciousness'.

Self-consciousness as a philosophical quest began with Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. By this expression Descartes did not just mean that he was sure of his own being, the existence of

[79]The German technical term for 'consciousness' is *Bewustsein*. *Bewustsein* indicates consciousness of an Object or just intentional consciousness. The addition of the pronoun *selbst (*self) gives *selbstbewust*, which refers to consciousness, knowledge or awareness of oneself. The emphasis here is not necessarily on the 'I' who is conscious as contrasted to the external world of objects; rather it is on seeing the external world of objects as the product, the possession or the mirror image of the 'I' (see Inwood, 1992:61 -63).

himself, the 'I'. He also meant that knowing or being conscious of his own existence was a fundamental basis of affirming the existence of the external reality, and more so the existence of a perfect Being (Butler, 1957:269,270). Fichte understood 'self-consciousness' in much the same way as Descartes. He called it the "... the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge" (Fichte, 1970:93). While Descartes and Fichte maintained 'self-consciousness' as a necessary inference in talking about external reality, Kant used it to bring to the attention of philosophy the fact that the external reality, which is the object of consciousness, is somewhat related to the nature of the 'I' or the subject that knows it. He graphically expressed this doctrine in the preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* in the following terms:

> Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts [for instance, to account for the possibility of objective knowledge] have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the task of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects conform to our knowledge (Kant, 1929:xvi).

The point of Kant, as Kain has explained, is that "...all objects are objects-of-my-consciousness they have been constituted by my consciousness and unified by my consciousness" (Kain, 1998:106).

Hegel took this thought and developed it farther. For him, as he clearly puts it in chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit,* self-consciousness "... has a double object: One is the immediate object ... which however for self-consciousness has the character of a negative; and the second, viz, itself, which is the true essence" (Hegel, 1977:105). As Kain has explained, Hegel's view of the object as negative means "... that in itself, the object is taken to be nothing- but a thing- for - my - consciousness. Self-consciousness takes itself to be the thing of significance. 'I' is what is important and essential; the object is nothing but a thing-for - me" (Kain, 1998:106). In the words of Inwood, the external object is primarily the product, the possession, or the mirror image of the subject 'I' (Inwood, 1992:61).

This theory of knowledge provided an entirely different philosophical structure upon which theology and the doctrine of God was henceforth going to stand. An alternative thought structure was necessary because the Enlightenment rejected the medieval cosmology and the issues that were

articulated with the framework of that cosmology as the guiding light. This meant that if eighteenth century man was to continue to speak intelligently of God, he would necessarily do so from an intellectual position that was not only current but also acceptable to the native context. This is the basis upon which the theory of 'self- consciousness' was taken up by theology and used in the latter's task of formulating the doctrine of God.

4.3 The Doctrine of God within the Scheme of 'Self-Consciousness'

In the theory of 'self-consciousness', God is understood as an Absolute Subject. How is this arrived at? Again, the Cartesian argument is handy here. Descartes, as Butler explains,

> ... was sure of his own being, but since he is equally sure that his being is imperfect and incomplete, he is convinced that there is another being beside himself which is complete and perfect. He asks what could possibly be the cause in him of this idea of perfect Being. In answering his question, he holds that imperfect being could hardly be the cause, because it is repugnant to think of a lesser causing a greater as it is to think of nothing causing something. And Descartes himself who possesses the idea, is an imperfect being. Therefore, he holds that perfect Being must exist beyond his own mind, and must be the cause of the idea of perfect Being in his mind (Butler, 1957:269, 270).

Descartes knew this Absolute Subject or Personality as 'perfect Being'. Other Idealists called the Absolute Subject 'Self', 'Universal mind', 'Reality', 'Reason' or 'Spirit'. Whatever they called the Absolute Subject, it is clear that they meant God[80]. They did not regard themselves as Christian theologians as such (although their inclination to religion is well documented); rather they viewed themselves as secular poets and thinkers and so they saw no reason for employing the theologically restricted term God that was current within the Christian orthodoxy.

The argument here, it is understood, is that all subjects posit[81] themselves as objects and are

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[80] Nicholas of Cusa used the term 'absolute' in referring to God as early as 1440. From then on, the term received wide acceptance as an expression for God in philosophical circles. Hegel clearly used the term to refer to God within the philosophical circles and he explained his preference for the term as arising from the fact that the term was generally accepted as a philosophical expression of the concept of God, but this time shorn of anthropomorphic presuppositions (Inwood, 1992:27).

[81] The term posit is from the German *setzen*, but Inwood has noted that in the philosophical usage it has been heavily influenced by the Greek *tithenai, tithesthai* ('to place', 'to affirm', 'to assume'). It indicates primarily the assumption or presupposition, the assertion or affirmation or simply the affirmation of (the existence of) an entity (Inwood, 1992:224).

conscious of this activity. God as an Absolute Subject also posits Himself as an Object and He too is conscious of that activity. This way of viewing God has far-reaching implications for the orthodox Christian doctrine of God. God is now understood not according to the orthodox terms of 'One God Three Persons'; rather, he is understood according to the terms of the Idealists, namely 'One Subject Three Modes or Subsistences'. Dorner, Barth's mentor on the concept of 'modes of being', explains the relationship between the 'modes' and the 'subject' in the following terms:

> In the trinitarian process of the life and spirit of God, absolute personality is the eternal present result; so the self-conscious God, who desires and possesses himself, is also present in such a way in each of the divine distinctions that these - which would not in themselves and individually be personal - yet participate in One of the divine modes, each in its own way. But as the absolute divine personality is the single constitution of the three divine modes of being which participate in it and has its understanding in them, as they have theirs in it, so this same divine personality which, in its ultimate relationship and according to its nature, is holy love, is also the single constitution and the highest power of all divine characteristics (Dorner quoted in Moltmann, 1981:241).

In this scheme of things, God the Father is understood to be the Subject; the Father alienates himself, externalises himself or posits himself as an object by 'producing' the Son; and the Holy Spirit is the 'self-consciousness' of the Father with respect to the relationship he has with the object of his reflection, namely the Son (Inwood, 1996:613,614). The Father is the 'I'. He therefore in this thought is what is important and essential, viz the true essence. The Son is the 'object' posited by the 'I', the true essence, and in that sense a 'thing for me', the 'I'. The Holy Spirit is the consciousness itself, the consciousness of the subject 'I', the Father, - the means by which the Father is conscious of the 'object' he posits, viz the Son. This way of speaking renders superfluous the term 'persons' as an equivalent of *upostaseis* as found in Christian orthodoxy. All there is is one absolute Personality or one Personal God. The Father is the essential mode of that One Personal God, the Son is simply the Father as posited by Himself and as such a mode of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Father's mode in which He is conscious of Himself as the real essence and Himself as the 'object'. (see Barth, CD I/1:359).

4.4 Barth and Rahner: Illustrations of the Idealist Construction of the Doctrine of God

4.4.1 Self-Revelation/Self-Communication

The Idealist account of the doctrine of God did not just come and go with the struggles within the Christian thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Protestantism and Catholicism have concrete Idealistic doctrines of God in our own time. The influential Protestant and Catholic scholars known for articulating the doctrine of God from the Idealists' philosophical standpoint are Karl Barth and Karl Rahner respectively. Both Barth and Rahner view God as having one centre of consciousness, and therefore as one subject with the ultimate capacity to reflect on himself and at the same time be aware of the nature of that reflection. This Idealist 'self- consciousness' underpins their respective explanations of the Christian doctrine of God although, in this regard, Barth as a theologian preferred the theological term 'self- revelation' and Rahner preferred 'self-communication'.[82]

Barth preferred the term 'self-revelation' because in his theology "God is ... independent of everything that is not he. God is whether everything else is, or is not, whether it is in this way or some other. If there is something other, it cannot precede God, it cannot place God in dependence upon itself" (Barth, CD II/1:308). For God to be known, he must therefore reveal himself, and this he did decisively in the incarnation throughout which he remained the divine subject (Barth, CD I/2:131ff; cf CD II/1:516ff). Rahner, on the other hand, chose the term 'self-communication' because he believes in a form of 'self-communication' of God. According to Rahner, already inbuilt in us is a divinized subjective orientation. This disposition allows us to have a transcendental experience of the absolute, which he also calls the 'mystery, one and the nameless'. As far as Rahner is concerned, this is the way we come to know God (Rahner, 1978:44, 53; cf TI IV:50, 106). He prefers to call the Son and the Holy Spirit the 'two processions' or 'self-communications' of God. These two are for

[82] It is important to note that these terms, 'self-revelation' and 'self-communication', also indicate the difference between these two theologians. For Barth, the concept of 'self-revelation' emphasises the fact that God cannot be known except as he has revealed himself. Rahner, on the other hand, uses 'self-communication' to indicate what he believes is the capacity of all men to know God. Rahner's concept of 'self-communication' would play

Rahner mystery itself (Rahner, TI IV:72). Consequently, for Rahner, the offer and the possibility of grace is given with human nature itself (Rahner, 1978:149).

4.4.2 Barth's view

Barth begins his articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity from commitment to the position that God's revelation is "God alone, wholly God, God himself". The basic explanation of this premise is that God reveals himself as the Yahweh, He alone is the revealer, and moreover He is wholly revelation. He himself is what is revealed" (Barth, GD I:87-95; Moltmann, 1981:140). For Barth, "God cannot reveal anything more certain, more specific, more living than himself. Any emptiness or abstraction that we might first feel when hearing the term 'God' is on our side" (Barth, GD I:89).

By 'God' Barth means the Father. The Father is the subject, the 'I'. As the 'I', Barth therefore understands the Father as the *principium* of deity (Barth, GD I:111, 114, 119). For Barth, the Father's being *principium* of deity or the divine fountain means that he is the mode of God's "... existence in which he is the originator of his other modes of existence" (Barth, CD I/1:451). Barth therefore graphically describes the Father as this "... thing, the type, origin, knowledge, will in God, in which he distinguishes Himself from Himself, from which proceeds the other thing, to wit the copy, outcome, word, decision; in short this fact that he can relate Himself as Creator and as our Father to one distinct from Himself outside of Him" (Barth, CD I/1:452). With the view that God means the Father and that the Father is in fact the *principium* of deity, Barth reached the conclusion that God is the one personal God in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son and in the mode of the Spirit (Barth, CD I/1:359).

The following words of Barth indicates how he viewed Christ:

> If we wish to state who Jesus Christ is ... we must also state or at least make clear - and inexorably so - that we are speaking of the Lord of Heaven and earth, who neither has nor did have any need of heaven or earth or man, who created them out of free love and according to his very own good pleasure, who adopts man, not according to the latter's merit, but according to his own mercy, not in virtue of the latter's capacity,

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a major role in his theology of the 'anonymous Christ'.

> but in virtue of his own miraculous power. He is the Lord who ... never ceases in the very slightest to be God, who does not give his glory to another. In this, as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, He is a truly loving, serving God. He is the King of all kings just as when he enters into the profoundest hiddenness in 'meekness of heart' (Barth, CD I/2:133)

What Barth means in the above excerpt is not entirely clear until we find other places where he in fact understands Christ as simply another mode of the Father. In Barth's own words Christ, the Word of God, meets us, as the Father himself "... but in another way, in a different way of being" (Barth, CD I/1:498). He is the Father's revelation and nothing more or less. The Father is "wholly and utterly" in His revelation, that is in Jesus Christ (Barth, CD II/1 74, 75). In Jesus Christ, the Father "... sets and gives to be known not something, be it the greatest and the most significant, but Himself exactly as He posits and knows Himself" (Barth, CD I/1:476). Elsewere Barth describes the eternal Logos as "... the eternal Word of the Father who speaks from all eternity, or the eternal thought of the Father who thinks from all eternity, the Word in which God thinks Himself, or expresses Himself by Himself" (ibid.:499). Thus Barth views the Son merely as the self-revelation of the One Subject—the Father.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is understood by Barth simply as 'participation' of the Father and the Son, "the common factor between the mode of existence of God the Father and God the Son, ... What is common to them as far as they are the Father and the Son". He is the 'Communion', the act of 'commityness' of the Father and the Son (ibid.:527). Elsewhere he gives this 'participation', 'communion', and 'commityness' the love flavour, so that the Father and the Son are viewed as participating in each other on the ground of love. Love, it is emphasised "... is the essence of the relation between" the Father and the Son (Barth, CD I/1:480). The Holy Spirit in Barth's theology is therefore merely a correlation between the Father and the Son, the correlation being love. From this position Barth was able to argue that the Holy Spirit is love itself, and therefore the basis of the theological statement "... God is love and love is God" (Barth, CDI/1:488).

Barth refuses to use the term persons as equivalent to the three *upostaseis*. As far as Barth is concerned, the concept "'Person' as used in the Church doctrine of the Trinity bears no direct relation to personality" (Barth, CD I/1:351). Barth thus assigns 'personality' to the unity of

God (ibid.). The reason Barth abandoned the word 'person' is because the term suggests that God has three centres of consciousness. Thus

> Barth, believing that the word inevitably suggested "three centres of consciousness" individualistically conceived, suggested the abandonment of the word *person* in connection with God's threeness, and preferred to speak of three mutually related modes (or ways) of being the one personal God. In so doing, he was attempting to mediate between Eastern and Western traditions, for the expression is borrowed from the Cappadocian Fathers who used both the term *person* and the term *modes of being* in an ontological and not a psychological sense (BCC Report, vol.1:21)

4.4.3 Rahner's view

Karl Rahner's Idealist interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity on the other hand is deeply motivated by his commitment to the position that there can never be a distinction between God as Godself (the immanent Trinity) and God as he relates to us (economic Trinity). For Rahner, the immanent Trinity is also the economic Trinity and the economic Trinity the immanent Trinity (Rahner, TI IV:96). This axiom means that we can understand God's pretemporal identity as being identical with the economic Trinity evident in the history of salvation. In other words, the appearing of the Son and the coming of the Holy Spirit are constitutive in the identity of God. We therefore cannot conceive of the eternal identity of God without bringing the Son and the Holy Spirit into the picture (Braaten, 1981:4).

When the term God is mentioned, Rahner believes that what is in view is the Father. The Father here is the God proper (Rahner, TI I:126-148). Rahner explains that

> ... when the New Testament thinks of God, it is the concrete, individual, uninterchangeable Person who comes into its mind, who is in fact the Father and is called so that inversely, when it is being spoken of, it is not the single divine nature that is seen, subsisting in three hypostases, but the concrete Person who possesses the divine nature unoriginately, and communicates it by eternal generation to a Son too and by spiration to the Spirit (Rahner, TI I:146).

The Father expresses or communicates himself only by speaking his Word (Rahner, TI IV:93). The Word uttered, Logos, is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son, whom he imparts "... as his own personal self disclosure" (Rahner, TI I:96) or "... concrete self-disclosure" (Rahner, TI I:100). The utterance and the incarnated Christ are here seen as having a

necessary relationship. In Rahner's own thought "... the Word is essentially the expressible, he who can be expressed even in the non-divine, being the Word of the Father, in whom the Father can express himself and freely exteriorize himself, and because, when this takes place, that which we call human nature comes to being" (Rahner, TI I:93). For Rahner, this 'exteriorizing' of the Father also means "the indissoluble, irrevocable" presence of the Father in the world as " salvation, love, and forgiveness, as communication to the world of the most intimate depths of the divine reality itself" (Rahner, TI I:49). The Word, the Logos, is therefore in the real sense the Father made visible, exteriorized, or revealed for the sake of man and his salvation. Jesus Christ is therefore just the Father as revealed.

In this scheme of things, the Holy Spirit is understood to be the mutual love that exists between the Father and his Logos or, put in another way, the love between the Father and his exterior self (Rahner, TI I:96). He simply is that deep intimacy and fondness that the Father has for his Logos and which the Logos too has for the Father. Rahner's position on what to make of the Holy Spirit is very close to Augustine's. In the Words of Augustine,

> Whether the Spirit is the unity of both [Father and Son], or the holiness, or the love, or whether he is the unity because he is the love, and the love because he is the holiness, it is manifest that he is not one of the two [Father and Son], because he is the one through whom the two are joined, through whom the Begotten is loved by the Begetter, and loves him who begot him, and through whom... . they are 'keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', which we are commanded to imitate by grace, both towards God and towards each other.... And therefore they [the Persons of the Trinity] are not more than three:One [the Father] who loves him [the Son] who is from himself, and one [the Son] who loves him [the Father] from whom he is, and Love itself [the Spirit]. And if this last one is nothing, how can God be love? If this last is not substance, how can God be substance? (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6:5:7)

And so it is clear that Rahner does not view the Holy Spirit as a distinct ontological reality answering to the term person. This is because he believes that the concept person cannot be predicated to the Holy Spirit, whom he sees as a mere correlation between the Father and the Son.

In the thought of Rahner, therefore, we find a one subject God who refuses to be expressed in the classical Nicene terms of One Substance and Three Persons. Instead, Rahner proposes that God be understood as One Subject and Three distinct modes or relative ways in which

God subsists (Rahner, TI I:95, 96; cf Rahner, 1970:103ff.). To sum up: "The one and the same God is given for us as Father, Son- logos, and Holy Spirit, or the Father gives himself in absolute self-communication through the Son in the Holy Spirit" (Rahner quoted in Moltmann, 1981:147). As far as Rahner is concerned the term 'person' means "that which subsists as distinct in a rational nature" (Rahner, 1970:104 n.25). For Rahner, subsistence involves distinction, particularity, concreteness and relationship. What the traditional language of the doctrine of the Trinity calls 'person' must, according to Rahner, mean "three distinct manners of subsisting" (Rahner, 1970:109).

4.5 Basic Characteristics of the 'God as Absolute Subject'

4.5.1 Modalistic in nature and thus Substitutes the term 'Mode' in Place of 'Person'

Here both the Son and the Holy Spirit have no independent existence of the kind we see in the Scripture; instead they are depicted as mere modes of the Father. In effect, there is only 'one Subject divinity' and that 'one Subject' is none other than the Father. The Son is simply 'alienated', 'externalised', or 'posited'. He who 'alienates', 'externalises', or 'posits' Himself is the Father who is the subject. The object, viz the Son, is what is 'alienated', 'externalised' or 'posited'. The Holy Spirit is the relationship of love between the Father (subject) and the Son (object). This one Subject divinity manifests himself first as the Father; then as the Son - the 'one Subject' divinity (the Father) thinking about Himself; and lastly as the Holy Spirit - still the 'one Subject' divinity (the Father) but presented as he is enjoying thinking about Himself (see Heick, 1966:189).

In effect, both the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to this thought, do not really exist except in the mind of the Father, for Christ is at the bottom line only 'the Father as he is thinking about Himself' and the Holy Spirit 'the Father enjoying thinking about Himself'. What is happenning here is that two experiences of the Father, viz thought and love, are isolated, presented successively and interpreted as the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively.[83]

[83] Moltmann believes that Barth and Rahner have been betrayed by their Idealistic heritage, which insists that it is the subject that acts and receives. For Barth and Rahner, "... the subjectivity of acting and receiving is

It is clear from this model of understanding the doctrine of God that the one divine subject acts and receives. As a matter of fact, personhood is transferred from the υποςταςεις to the one divine Subject. The υποςταςεις are merely modes of the one Subject. The question which we must raise at this point is whether theology sees its role as providing models and metaphors for the Christian orthodoxy or as deriving them from the Christian orthodoxy. The issue, as Professor Brümmer has put it, is that

> Systematic theologians do not create models for God. They derive them from the religious traditions in which they stand. For the Christians the Bible is the classic text of their tradition and as such the classic source of metaphors and models in terms of which they understand the meaning of their lives and the world. In the tradition of the church these models have been actualised, interpreted, reinterpreted, developed, and amended in many ways throughout the ages and handed down in many ways from person to person and from generation to generation (Brümmer, 1998:13).

It is understandable that the theological models may lose their original force in the process of being "actualised, interpreted, reinterpreted, developed, and amended" (see Brümmer, 1998:13) and as they get transmitted in different ways from one person to the other and from one generation to the next. Barth, Rahner, and H Berkhof see this as having happened to the term 'person'. However, the solution is not to reject the term. In fact, if this line of argument were to be followed, theology would have no model and metaphor to discuss, since virtually no theological concept has been spared of abuse. Rather, theology has the twin task of preserving the concepts as they are in the Christian story and reinterpreting them for the new situations of reception in terms that are not only consistent with their meaning in their native contexts, but which are also intelligible to the receiving situation.

4.5.2 God Presented as a Monad

Trinity as a theological term makes sense only in the context of talking about the plurality (three-ness) in the Godhead. The 'one Subject' divinity, as we have just seen, articulates the plurality in modalistic terms. According to this model, the 'one Subject' divinity (the Father), expresses Himself successively in his other modes (the Son and the Holy Spirit). However,

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transferred from the three divine Persons to the one divine subject. But viewed theologically this is a late triumph for the Sabellian modalism which the early church condemned. The result would be to transfer the subjectivity of action to a deity concealed 'behind' the three Persons" (Moltmann, 1981:139).

even if we grant that the Son, though a mode of the Father, be understood as an 'individual', we still would have only two individuals in the Godhead: The Father and the Son. But deep in us we know that the Son, according to this thought is not really distinguished from the Father and therefore the former has no individuality of his own. As such, both the individuality and the deity of the Son are effectively ruled out. His individuality and deity are accented, but only in name.

The 'one Subject' divinity model does not view the Holy Spirit as an individual at all. He is viewed by this model simply as a correlation of the Father and the Son, the 'consciousness' of the Father, the 'mutual intense passion' and 'love' between the two, the 'communion' between the two, and as just about anything that explains the relationship between the Father and the Son. We have already seen what Barth and Rahner think about the Holy Spirit. Moltmann agrees with them, but discusses the Holy Spirit as mere "... condition which allows the Son to shine in the Father and transfigures the Father in the Son, ... the consciousness of the divine life which facilitates ... the sacred feast of the Trinity" (Moltmann, 1981:173 - 176). The individuality of the Holy Spirit in this case also exists only in name. Under circumstances such as these, one cannot possibly talk of the Trinity. Trinity is what it is only if we are talking of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct persons in the Godhead. In that case the unity and the particularity in the Godhead are upheld in the terms that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, yet not three gods but One God. The moment we lose focus of this distinction and particularity or demote one of the members of the Godhead, the theological term Trinity also ceases to make sense.

4.6 Conclusion

The 'God as an absolute subject' theology is of the opinion that behind the three Persons is one Subject who acts and receives. This in effect transfers 'personhood' from the υποςταςεις to the one Divine subject. On account of this transfer, the Idealistic theologians have proposed that the term 'person' be abandoned altogether when making reference to the Trinity and in its place the term 'mode' be instituted. The reason for this change is clearly not the need to be more biblical. The reason is to align theology with the contemporary Western notion of 'person'. 'Person' for the modern Westerner, is no longer simply an

individual with rationality, but rather the subject 'I' who is conscious.

The 'God as an absolute subject' theology therefore reinterprets the doctrine of the Trinity within the infrastructure of the Idealistic philosophy. Scholars like Barth and Rahner see this interpretation as adequate to the Western context that constructs its reality from the point of view of Idealism.

However, I believe that there are two important contributions of the 'God as an absolute subject' model of interpreting the Trinity. The first addresses the issue of the unity factor in the Trinity. The concept of the 'one God' in the Trinitarian formula is not just some static concept that can be represented by the concept of substance. One God is Yahweh the God of Israel. The second contribution is in questioning the relevance of Neo-Platonism in certain cultural contexts. Before the rise of Idealistic philosophy, it was simply believed that Neo-Platonic metaphysics owned copyright to expressions of truth. Barth and Rahner did not need the Neo-Platonic system in order for them to give the modern Western world the doctrine of the Trinity that matches their current thought pattern. What seems to be important is this question: How can I use the infrastructure of the thought pattern current in the situation of reception to express a theological truth without compromising the latter?

5 God as Community in Unity

5.1 Introduction

Much of the present discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity in the Western context listens to the 'God as essence' on the one hand and the 'God as an absolute subject' on the other hand. Generally, the Trinitarian scholars of today seem to view the 'God as essence' as obsolete. The focus is trained on how Barth and Rahner responded to the 'God as essence' and what to make of their proposal, namely 'God as an absolute subject' (see Collins, 1997 and McWilliams, 1996). This general shift in focus has led to the acceptance of the view that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and vice versa.[84]

Although a great number of contemporary Western Christian thinkers operate with the 'God as an absolute subject' model, there is evidently a growing interest in a third model: 'God as community in unity' or simply "God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love and communion which make them one sole God" (see Brown, 1985; Torrance, 1994 and Boff, 1988). The Western scholars who seek to understand the doctrine of the Trinity within this model generally take their point of departure from the concept of *homoousios* as it is understood by John Calvin, Gregory of Nazianzen and Athanasius (see Torrance, 1994:21-76).

5.2 Motives for Renewed interest in 'God as Community in Unity'

Several Western Christian thinkers today seek to understand the doctrine of the Trinity from the concept of 'God as community in unity'. Some of the leading lights in this search are J Zizioulas and JJ O'Donnell. The Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, in his book *Being as Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (1985), his article 'On Being a Person - Towards an Ontology of Personhood' in *Persons, Divine and Human* (1991), and his other

[84] See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco Harper & Row, 1981), xi; Roger E Olson, Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 219-20; PK Jewett, *God, Creation and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 305; Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 115; and GD Kaufman, *Systematic Theology* (NY: Scribner's, 1968), 250-52.

article "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution" in *Trinitarian Theology Today* (1995), makes a candid enquiry into the *Plurality model* of the Cappadocian tradition and particularly the understanding of personhood in that tradition. Like O'Donnell (*The Mystery of the Triune God*, 1988:101), Zinzioulas appeals to Richard of St Victor who understands personhood in the same way as the Cappadocian fathers. Richard of St Victor understands personhood from the concept of *existence*, which Collins explains as 'being in relation' (Collins, 1997:97). This understanding runs against the *Unity Model* of the Augustinian tradition, which espouses a "unitary psychological modeling of the Godhead and of personhood" (Collins, 1997:97).[85]

Collins has noted that there are different reasons why a growing number of modern Western Christian thinkers are opting for the 'God as community in unity' model of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.

> One reason is that the social model of the Godhead of the Eastern tradition is seen as that which most closely reflects the primary data of the human experience of divine activity. Another is that the Trinity seen as being-in-relation offers a paradigm for the human community over against such notions as hierarchy and patriarchy. This in turn provides models and metaphors for those seeking political, liberation and feminist theologies (Collins, 1997:95).

David Brown's *The Divine Trinity* (1985) argues strongly against the Augustinian tradition summarised in the *Unity Model*, and instead proposes the *Plurality Model* of the Cappadocian tradition. His basis for making this claim is the position that the essential Christian experience of God is the personal communion with Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, he concludes that the *Plurality Model* "is a more basic datum than [the] ultimate unity. This is one of the most important new perspectives that modern historical investigations of the New Testament has revealed, but so far it has been inadequately taken into account in discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity" (Brown, 1985:287). TF Torrance also defends the *Plurality Model* (see his two books *The Trinitarian Faith*, 1988 and

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[85] Other interesting contributors to the 'Divinity as community in unity' model of interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity include Y Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol.III (1983), AI McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood, A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (1990), CE Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (1993) and L Boff, Trinity and Society (1988). Other significant contributors in this field are David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (1985) and TF Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (1988) and *The Trinitarian Perspectives* (1984).

Trinitarian Perspectives, Toward Doctrinal Agreements, 1984). According to Torrance, the concept of *homoousios* led Athanasius and consequently the Cappadocians to see the Godhead as a plurality of three persons in one *ousia.* Leonardo Boff places the idea of the *perichoresis* at the very centre of his understanding of the Godhead. As far as he is concerned, the concept of the perichoresis provides a pattern for human social existence. He writes:

> ... the Trinitarian communion between the divine Three, the union between them in love and the vital interpenetration, can serve as a source of inspiration, as a utopian goal that generates models of successively diminishing differences. This is why I am taking the concept of perichoresis as the structural axis of these thoughts (Boff, 1988:6,7)

5.3 The Idea of the Divine *Perichoresis*

The concept of the divine *perichoresis* or 'God as community in unity' is connected to the idea of the divine substance (*homoousis*) as expressed in each person. According to Athanasius, "We are allowed to know the Son in the Father, because the whole Being of the Son is proper to the Father's being. ... For whereas the form of Godhead of the Father is in the Being of the Son, it follows that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son" (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 3.3). Athanasius further amplifies this thought when he explains that "the Son and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature and in the identity of the one Godhead. The Godhead of the Son's is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but he. And so since they are one, the Godhead himself is one, the same things are said of the Son as are said of the Father" (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 3.5). Speaking elsewhere about the Holy Spirit, Athanasius remarks that the Spirit too, unlike creatures which are found only in separately determinate localities, is omnipresent and therefore must be God; and moreover the Spirit must be in the Son too and the Son is established to be in the Father (Athanasius, *ad Serap.* 3.4; 4.4).

For Athanasius, the concept of *homoousios* did not just mean the intercommunication of the properties of the Persons as well as the oneness in Being and activity of the Persons of the Trinity. The idea of the *homoousios* also meant coinherence. And so, besides existing in the unity of Being and activity, the Divine Persons were also understood to be existing in "a complete mutual indwelling in which each Person, while remaining what he is by himself as

Father, Son or Holy Spirit, is wholly in others as the others are wholly in him" (Torrance, 1994:10).

Hilary too has made an input into the development of the doctrine of the divine *perichoresis.* For Hilary, the starting point is God's nature. The Father contains all things but can be contained by none. The Son is a perfect offspring of the Father, and consequently he is endowed with the properties that are in the Father (*de Trin.* 3.1; 2, 4). Elsewhere, Hilary argues that the Son is derived wholly from the whole of His Father's nature, consequently he has the whole of His Father's nature, and thus he abides in the Father because he is God (ibid., 9.69).

Whereas Athanasius and Hilary put emphasis on the the fact that the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father and the Spirit in both, Basil argued strongly for the use of the phrase 'with' in preference to 'in' in describing the divine Persons (Basil, *de Spir. sanct.* 63). Gregory of Nyssa approached the issue from the conception that the divine persons mutually 'contain one another'. Previously, Athanasius had used the concept of omnipresence. Gregory of Nyssa posed the question: If the Father is perfect and fills all things, what is left for the Son to contain? Gregory of Nyssa's response is that the Father and the Son are receptive and permeative (*choretikos*) of one another. The idea 'containing one another' is understood in the sense of the mutual envelopment of one another (Gregory of Nyssa, *adv. et Sab.*12; 266). According to Gregory Nazienzen, "each of the Divine Persons is entirely one with those with whom he is conjoined, as he is in himself, because of the identity of being and power that is between them. This is the reason for the Oneness so far as we have apprehended it. If this reason has force, thanks be to God for the insight; if it is not, let us seek a stronger one" (Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio* 31.16, see also 31.14;cf 25.16, 26.19, and 42.15ff.)[86]

[86] Athanasius, Hilary, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazienzen all understood *homoousios* as conveying the concept of the coinherence of the three persons in the one identical Being of God. However, patristic theology owes the term perichoretic relation to Gregory of Nazienzen, who applied it to the way in which the Divine Persons mutually contain and interpenetrate one another while retaining their identities as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio* 18.42)

What could be considered a later development of the doctrine of the divine *perichoresis* is found in Pseudo-Cyril. We here quote Prestige's rendering of the understanding of this anonymous author:

> We assert that each of the three possesses a perfect hypostasis ... but maintain one ousia, simple, final, ... perfect, in three perfect hypostaseis; so again ... we call the Holy Trinity one God ... the three hypostaseis; they are united ... not so as to be confounded, but so as to adhere ... to one another, and they possess co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture (Prestige, 1952:297-98).

Interestingly, John Calvin's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is in the same continuum as Athanasius', Hilary's, Gregory of Nyssa's and Gregory of Nazienzen's. Like these early Fathers, Calvin emphasises the oneness of the Being of the incarnate Son with the Being of the Father (Calvin, *Institute* I.13.7-11; cf Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio*, 30.18; 31.6; 33.16; 38.7; 45.3; Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 4.15-24). Moreover, for Calvin the issue is not just the oneness of the Being of the incarnate Son with the Being of the Father; it also has to do with the oneness of agency and power between them. This, for Calvin, means that one cannot simply separate what the Son does from what the Father does. For Calvin this ontological oneness is of crucial significance to the entire Christological debate (see Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.12-13). To the question why the Holy Spirit is divine, Calvin has the same response. For him, the Holy Spirit is divine because of his subsistence in God. He says, "the Holy Spirit does not act from outside of God or apart from him, but from within God" (Calvin, Institute, I.13.14ff; cf 1Cor.2.9ff.; 3.16; 6.19; 2 Cor.6.16; Acts 5.3; 28.25; etc.).

Having established the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in a style that is clearly reminiscent of what we see in the Church Fathers, Calvin goes on to put his own approval on the doctrine of the divine *perichoresis*. On this issue he says the following:

> A certain distinction of the Father from the Word, and of the Word from the Spirit, is clearly pointed out by the Scriptures—but the very magnitude of the mystery warns us of the great reverence and sobriety with which we must proceed in examining this. I am immensely delighted by the statement of Gregory Nazienzen:'I can not think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One'. Accordingly let us not allow ourselves to imagine a Trinity of Persons in such a partitive way that our thought is not immediately bought back to that Unity. The words 'Father', 'Son', and 'Spirit' certainly import a real distinction—let no one think that they are mere epithets

by which God is variously designated from his works—it is a *distinction,*[87] however not a division (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.7; cf Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio*, 40.41).

This understanding of the Divine Persons and their interrelationship led Calvin to articulate the doctrine of God as follows:

> When we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood one simple Being... in which we comprehend three Persons or hypostaseis; and whenever the name of God is employed indefinitely... the Son and Spirit, no less than the Father, are indicated. However when the Son is joined to the Father, relation is introduced... and so we distinguish between the Persons. But because the properties of the Persons carry an order with them... having to do with beginning and origin... in the Father, whenever mention is made of the Father and the Son together, or of the Father and the Spirit together, the name of God is peculiarly ascribed to the Father. In this way the unity of Being is retained, and regard for order is preserved, but which in no way derogates from the Deity of the Son and the Spirit (Calvin, *Institue*, I.13.20)

Clearly therefore, Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity revolves around the Father as the 'Divine *principium*'[88] on the one hand and the eternal distinctions and interrelations of the Divine Persons on the other hand.[89] Here then we see the whole Trinity comprising three inseparable consubstantial Persons indwelling one another and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Being that is common to the Father and the Son.

The scholars who understand the doctrine of God within the structures of 'God as

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[87] Calvin makes it clear that the distinctions are not to be traced back to the incarnation, rather they existed antecedently and inherently in the one Godhead. The incarnation only made the distinctions recognizable (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.17-21)

[88] Calvin prefers to use the term *pricipium divinitatis*. By this term he meant that Christ is not from himself, he has a beginning in the Father. He is quick to add, however, that the *prinicipium divinitas* has to do with order and position and not ontological priority (Calvin, Institute, I.13.6, 18, 20-25). For Calvin, the Father is not merely the 'Divine *arche*' we see in the Cappadocians, for Deity can never be derived. Christ is Divine both because of the *homoousios* and because he is the Son. One Being of God is wholly common to the Father and the Son (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.2, 7f., 23) and on the other hand "unless the Father were God, he could not be the Father, and unless the Son were God, he could not be the Son, thus his Being is without *principium*, but the *principium* of his person is God himself" (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.25).

[89] Unlike the Cappadocians, Calvin accepts the Western understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, far from interfering with the utterly simple unity of God, it serves to prove that the Son is One with God the Father, because he constitutes one spiritual Being with him, while the Spirit is not something other than the Father and different from the Son, because he is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.19). Calvin therefore does not limit the Spirit to the Person of the Holy Spirit, rather he uses it in a sense which refers to the entire spiritual being of God. Since the Spiritual being of the Father is shared by the Son and the Holy Spirit, the procession of the Holy Spirit must be from this common being (Calvin, Institute, I.13.2, 19f., 24, 29).

Community in Unity' do not see what is common to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as a substantial reality. As far as the 'God as Community in Unity' theologians are concerned, the unity factor in the context of the Trinity is love. According to this model, God is each of the divine persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – sharing in divine love. Hall has described this phenomenon as

> ... personal, communal, loving, and altruistic. In a wonderful divine surprise, God within his own being as one God, exists as a living relationship of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence the God celebrated and adored in Christian worship exists and has always existed as a communion of infinite, self-giving love. There is no solitary God lurking behind the divine persons (Hall, 1997:28).

5.4 Basic Characteristics of 'God as Community in Unity'

5.4.1 Gives emphasis to the divine Persons

The traditional formula, 'One God and Three Persons', is understood in a personal way. The doctrine of God understood within the model of 'God as Community in Unity' takes the view that the Father is the 'Divine fountain' or, as Calvin puts it, the *principium divinitas.* Here the Divine Being is not defined abstractly, rather the One Being is *Yahweh*—the 'I am'. The 'God as Community in Unity' model therefore upholds the view that Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are not mere epithets by which God is variously designated (see Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.7). Rather Father, Son and Holy Spirit refer to God as he exists in himself and as he has revealed himself though Jesus Christ and the Spirit.[90]

5.4.2 Defines Person as a being in relation

In the philosophy of the Church Fathers, substance or nature refers to the *what* of something. Thus human nature or substance refers to the nature of all human beings. There is nothing unique about it. For the Church Fathers, however, person has to do with the question *how* and can only be predicated of one being in an absolute sense. Man, for example, is only an

[90] A significant paradigmatic change in the understanding of both Christ and the Holy Spirit is worth noting here. The locus of the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is not the possession of a divine nature, neither is it the act of objectifying God, rather it is the relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father. And so here is a paradigm shift, not from substance metaphysics to metaphysics of self-consciousness, but a shift to the metaphysics of relations.

image of God, he is subject to limitations of space and time; however, he is called to exist in the way God exists. The image of God in man has to do with how to exist in the way God exists. Man, according to this philosophy, is therefore free to "affect the how of his existence either in the direction of the way (the *how*) God is, or in the direction of *what* his, ie man's nature is". Man can therefore live either according to the human nature or in the way God exists, that is in the image of God's personhood (Zizioulas, 1995:55).

For the Church Fathers, person is therefore the how or the way of being of God himself. God does not exist in isolation; he exists in a communion. The Father exists in love and relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet in this relationship there is also the question of the personal identity that should not be lost to view. The names Father, Son and the Holy Spirit do not merely indicate personal identity in the divine interrelationship. Besides this obvious function, the names also provide us with a model of how we as persons may exist with God, with fellow human beings and with the rest of God's creation.

5.4.3 Understands the unity factor as love

According to this view of understanding God, the essence of God has no substantial content. God's essence is not even considered to be the Father as we saw in the 'Divinity as absolute Subject' model of interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, the 'Divinity as Community in Unity' views the essence of God as love. The epistemological basis of this position is that God has shown this love to us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The incomprehensible mystery of the divine nature "... is the wondrous communion of love demonstrated and communicated to us in Jesus Christ" (Hall, 1997:28).

5.5 Conclusion

'God as Community in Unity' presents us with a fundamental issue for modern theology—the need to revisit the divine plurality we see in the New Testament and its implications for Christian thought, worship and social action. The New Testament's picture of the divine persons helps us to put into perspective the Father who sent the Son and who is involved with

us through the Holy Spirit. God is not detached from the world. In spite of conflicts, wars, disease, hunger, poverty, and the cruelty of socio-political systems, we can be sure that God in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is an everpresent reality.

This perspective of understanding the Trinity also refocuses our attention on to the biblical meaning of the term 'person'. 'Person' according to the Bible is not an isolated individual with rationality seeking to preserve an autonomous self, as the Western world would have it. Rather, as far as theology is concerned, to be 'person' is to have the image of God and thus to exist according to the way in which God exists. Once again we are reminded that God is not a lone being lurking behind the divine persons. Rather, as Hall says, God's existence itself is "... personal, communal, loving and altruistic" (Hall, 1997:28). This is possible because the divine persons are in the first place not isolated individuals but persons in relationship with one another.

6 Pertinent Issues in the Western Reinterpretations of the Doctrine of God

6.1 Introduction

The attempts of Western Christian thought to reinterpret the Christian understanding of the doctrine of God could be put into three distinct goups: 'God as Essence', 'God as an absolute Subject' and 'God as Community in Unity'. Each group or model of interpretation has its own unique philosophical presuppositions. The 'God as Essence' school is clearly operating within neo-Platonic structures, 'God as an absolute Subject' comes from German Idealism, while 'God as Community in Unity' seeks to function within the same conceptual framework as the Church Fathers.[91] The philosophical commitments of each of these schools of reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity have significantly affected their respective theological outcomes. However, in spite of the differences in philosophical commitments and theological outcomes, there are common threads that run across the three models.

6.2 Differences of Western models of interpreting the doctrine of God

Divinity as Essence	**Divinity as one Subject**	**Divinity as Community in Unity**
God is understood in abstract terms. When I say God, what I mean is the impersonal 'essence', or 'substance' of God, the Godhead. Substance is therefore the locus of divinity.	God is viewed as the ultimate subject. When I say God, what I mean is the Father. The other members of the Trinity are only real as long as the Father is real. They are but mere modes or extensions of the Father.	God is the relation existing between the persons of the Trinity. When I say God, I mean the koinonia, the perichoretic relationship with which the three divine persons are ultimately linked and in which they exist. God has no true being, no ontological content, apart from communion (*koinonia*). Relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the locus of divinity.

[91] Of particular interest to 'God as Community in Unity' theologians is the way Athanasius, Gregory of Nazienzen and John Calvin understood the concept of *homoousios*. They also follow the Church Fathers' definition of 'person' as 'being in relation'.

Persons of the Trinity are understood as pure relations. The Father is the Father because he is unbegotten and the Son proceeds from the Father and the Holy Spirit 'spirates' from the Father through the Son. The Son is the Son because he is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit is who he is because he proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The divine Persons are thus not concretised in the sense we see in the divine economy.	Is not at ease with the idea of the divine Persons. Instead the concept 'Person' is applied to the Father alone, the Son is merely the Father as externalised, and the Holy Spirit is the 'Self-Consciousness' of the Father regarding his relationship with the Son.	Divine Persons are not adjunct to the divine essence. Free Persons are essential to the constitution of true being, and the Persons are said to be free because they affirm their identity by means of *perichoresis*.
Uses the philosophical infrastructure of Neo-Platonism.	Uses the philosophical infrastructure of Idealism.	Insists on going back to the philosophy of the Church Fathers.
Accepts the notion of *filioque*	Accepts *filioque*.	Historically this point of view rejects *filioque* because of its very strong links with Eastern theology. However, like Calvin, it is possible to hold this point of view without rejecting the *filioque*

From the features displayed in the table above, it is clear that the three schools of reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity have features that make them unique and distinct. Historically, the 'God as an absolute Subject' began as a reaction against the 'God as Essence' and the 'God as Community in Unity' sees itself as a resuscitation of the hitherto moribund Cappadocian heritage. The result has been an attempt by each of the positions to distance itself from the other two as far as possible. The discrepancy of this style of presentation is that the question of which model is to be taken is posed in terms of either or as the readers are confronted with a situation which has only three options, 'God as Essence', 'God as an absolute Subject' or 'God as Community in Unity'.

As we look at these models, we are confronted with the question: Which model is adequate and for what context is it adequate?[92] These models may not be entirely adequate for the African context, however we cannot deny that they have tremendous merits. Theology has over the years known only these models of reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, the survival of theology as a credible discipline during the heyday of Neo-Platonism on the one hand and German Idealism on the other hand has historically been pegged to the willingness of theology to accept and constructively make use of Neo-Platonism and German Idealism respectively. The rise of the 'God as Community in Unity' model in our own time has no doubt given the Church a new interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. Although these models of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity are different, they have a common interest in the incarnation question, the concept of the *homoousios,* and the identity debate.

6.3 Issues common to the Theological Models

6.3.1 The Incarnation

How the Western contexts understand the doctrine of God has undoubtedly been influenced by the historical concept of the incarnation. Right from the time of the Church Fathers, Western theologies have generally recognised that God became incarnate, suffered on the cross and redeemed mankind by dying and rising again. It is on the basis of acknowledging the gravity of the incarnation that the Fathers articulated such concepts as the *ageneton* and *homoousios,* and *upostaseis* (see chapter 2).

Of course the concepts of the *ageneton* and *upostaseis* in particular have generated a lot of debate within Western theology. The Church Fathers such as Athanasius, Hilary and the Cappadocians saw the *upostasis* of the Father as the *ageneton.* They thus called the Father the 'divine fountain', later rendered, especially in the works of John Calvin, as *principium divinitas.* Augustine, on the other hand, held a view of the Godhead that led him to see the

[92] Professor Vincent Brümmer suggests criteria for determining the adequacy of theological models. According to him, "all of these are necessary and none of them is sufficient. These are (1) consonance with tradition, (2) comprehensive coherence, (3) adequacy for demands of life, and (4) personal authenticity (Brümmer, "Metaphorical Thinking", 1998:13).

ageneton as belonging to the divine essence that is common to the three persons of the Trinity. With the different definitions of the *ageneton* came different views of the *upostasis,* as we saw in part 2 of this research. However, regardless of how Western theologies explain the *ageneton* and *upostaseis*, there is no indication that the theologies question the basic principle of the incarnation. 'God as essence', 'God as an absolute subject' and 'God as Community in Unity' clearly differ on how to understand 'substance' or 'essence'[93] on the one hand, and *hypostaseis*[94] on the other hand; however, they all agree that their goal is to articulate the truth that God became man and lived among us at a point in history.

6.3.2 The concept of the *Homoousios*

In addition to agreeing on the basic issue of the incarnation, it also is apparent that Western theologies have no problem with the basic concept of *homoousios*. According to Athanasius, "We are allowed to know the Son in the Father, because the whole Being of the Son is proper to the Father's being. ... For whereas the form of Godhead of the Father is in the Being of the Son, it follows that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son" (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 3.3). Elsewhere Athanasius amplifies this thought when he explains that "the Son and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature and in the identiy of the one Godhead. The Godhead of the Son's is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but he. And so since they are one, the Godhead himself is one, the same things are said of the Son as are said of the Father" (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 3.5). Talking about the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit and the Father, Athanasius says that the Spirit, unlike creatures which are found only in separately determinate localities, is omnipresent and therefore must be God; and moreover the Spirit must be in the Son too and the Son is established to be in the Father (Athanasius, *ad Serap.* 3.4; 4.4).

There is not much difference between the statements of Athanasius cited above and those we find in the standard Augustinian theology (see *Quincunque Vult*). Reformed theology

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[93] 'God as essence' understands the unity factor as 'substance' or 'essence', 'God as absolute subject' views the unity factor as the Father, while 'God as Community in Unity' sees love the unity factor.

[94] Person in 'God as essence' is hypostatic relation, in 'God as absolute subject' person is mode, whereas in 'God as Community in Unity' to be person is to exist in a community governed by the principle of love.

pioneered by John Calvin indicates a similar viewpoint. Calvin clearly emphasised the oneness of the Being of the incarnate Son with the Being of the Father (Calvin, *Institute* I.13.7-11; cf Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio*, 30.18; 31.6; 33.16; 38.7; 45.3; Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 4.15-24). In the process, Calvin also stressed the oneness of agency and power between the Father and the Son. Thus for Calvin one cannot separate what the Son does from what the Father does. There is therefore an ontological oneness which is of crucial significance to the entire Christological debate (see Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.12-13) and the Pneumatological discussions (Calvin, *Institute*, I.13.14ff; cf 1Cor.2.9ff.; 3.16; 6.19; 2 Cor.6.16; Acts 5.3; 28.25; etc.).

In summary, the Western theologies, as is evident in the *Quincunque Vult* and in the works of John Calvin, seem to see the concept of *homoousios* as a phenomenon in which "each of the Divine Persons is entirely one with those with whom he is conjoined, as he is in himself, because of the identity of being and power that is between them" (Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio* 31.16, see also 31.14). Gregory Nazienzen, who authored the statement quoted above, went on to add "... this is the reason for the Oneness so far as we have apprehended it. If this reason has force, thanks be to God for the insight; if it is not let us seek a stronger one" (Gregory Nazienzen, *Oratio* 31.16, see also 31.14;cf 25.16, 26.19, and 42.15ff.)

6.3.3 The Identity Problem

There is no doubt that Westerners seek to understand the doctrine of God from a Western point of view. The attempts by the approaches of 'God as essence', 'God as an absolute subject' and 'God as Community in Unity' to interpret the doctrine of God are clearly done from philosophical positions that are Western in origin and character. Neo-Platonism and Idealist philosophy are of course ways in which the West has reinterpreted its reality. Theology, for the sake of relevance, must critically make use of the intellectual culture of the situation of reception to convey universal theological statements.

Besides utilising thought patterns native to the Western environment, Western theologies have maintained their discussion of the doctrine of God within Christian boundaries. The Western peoples, it must be noted, had native gods. The ones whose memories have lingered

long are Wodan, god of the dead; Donar, god of thunder and the sky; and Tyr, god of war (Smith, 1950:35). However, in the thought of a Westerner today, God is not Wodan, Donar or Tyr; the Christian faith took the class word god from the Teutonic thought and filled it with new content (Smith, 1950:35). Regardless of the differences between the models of interpretation, the doctrine of God in the Western theologies are efforts by the Western Church to understand the God who has revealed himself in Christ and is present in the Spirit.

6.4 Conclusion

The doctrine of God in Western Christian thought is a complex matter. In a sense, it has remained at the center of the Christian thought since the inception of the Christian faith. The study of the doctrine of the Trinity Western theologies leads us to the following observations:

1) That theology is clarified using the native metaphysics. Barth's view of the doctrine of the Trinity is different from Thomas Aquinas', not because either of the two sought to be less biblical. Similarly, TF Torrance's view of the Trinity is fundamentally different from either Barth's or Aquinas'. The reason for the differences is to be located in the philosophical system each of these thinkers employed in the interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Whereas Aquinas used the philosophical infrastructure of Neo-Platonism, Barth and Torrance use the conceptual framework of German Idealism and of the Church Fathers respectively.
2) That the content of theology must come from the Christian faith. From the experience of the West, it seems that in dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity we give clear thought to the concept of the incarnation, we give prominence to the idea of *homoousios*, and we locate the identity question within the Christian faith. The philosophical system we choose to use must adequately explain what the Christian message means by one God made known in three persons.
3) The Western church is part of the universal Church. We cannot take for granted the theological developments in the Western church. The West interprets the doctrine of God in ways that only the West can do. The 'God as essence', the 'God as an absolute Subject', and the 'God as Community in Unity' views clearly utilise Western patterns of thought. This, in a way, makes it difficult for peoples outside of the Western cultures to fully grasp the interpretations, but on the other hand it challenges those cultures to make use of their own thought patterns to articulate their theology.

Part Three

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN AFRICAN INCULTURATION THEOLOGY

"Christianity is not only not a local religion, but it has adapted itself to the people wherever it has gone. No language or social existence has been any barrier to it; and I have often thought that in this country [Africa] it will acquire wider power, deeper influence and become instinct - with a higher vitality than anywhere else"(Bleyden quoted in Bediako, 1995:13)

7 The African Conceptual Framework

7.1 Introduction

The question of how the African constructs his reality is relevant to our study of the doctrine of the Trinity. From part two of this research it is clear that major reinterpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity within the Christian orthodoxy have been affected by the infrastructure of the philosophical system that was used. The Africans do not construct their reality from the point of view of either Neo-Platonism or Philosophical Idealism. The African peoples differ from other peoples in that they have another way of thinking. It is acute for this research to establish how the African peoples think and organise their reality. Our purpose for doing this here is to establish how the Africans are likely to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity.

African cosmology researchers have indicated that the African peoples organise their reality according to a specific thought pattern (see Prologue). This discovery is crucial for at least three issues. In the first place, it indicates that the African peoples have their own unique way of viewing and interpreting reality and that that 'way' was not loaned from some foreign quarter of the globe. The peoples studied by Tempels, Griule, Dieterlen, Kagame, Jahn and Mbiti are Africans. The findings of these scholars indicate in clear terms that what we are dealing with is a conceptual framework that is indigenous to Africa and receives recognition among the four African Negroid phyla, viz the Khoisan, the Nilo-Saharan, the Afro-Asiatic and the Niger-Congo. Having a unique way of making sense of reality also means that the Africans have a right to express universal ideas in ways that best suit their circumstances and experiences.

Besides indicating that the patterns of thought are not 'loaned', the essence of the patterns signify that the African mind has never been a *tabula rasa*. Contrary to the thought within the missionary enterprise of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries[95], the

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[95] From Bediako's analysis, it is clear that the missionary thinking in relation to Africa contributed to the general European outlook on Africa. The motive of the Christian mission to Africa, believes Bediako, is the humanitarian involvement with a 'totally inferior people', people who were thought to be completely

African peoples have always had religion and morals, neither was Africa as dark and ignorant as it was depicted (see Hastings, 1967:60). Anthropologists and theologians writing in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries have indicated in clear terms that the images of Africa received in Europe were way out of line with the situation on the ground.[96] It is important for theology to accept that the African mind was never a *tabula rasa.* Such an admission is important because the doctrine of *tabula rasa* was, as Teresia Hinga explains, the reason the "... missionaries were rather ruthless in their destruction of the African way of life... Behaving ... like a bull in a 'China shop' – they dismissed aspects of African culture as primitivity, and their spirituality as so much superstition, fetishism, animism" (Hinga, 1994:12). In any case, as W Robertson Smith once wrote:

> No positive religion that has moved man has been able to start with a *tabula rasa* to express itself as if religion was beginning for the first time; in form if not in substance, the new system must be in contact all along with the old ideas and practice which it finds in possession. A new scheme of faith can find a hearing only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist in its audience, and it cannot reach these without taking account of the traditional forms in which religious feeling is embodied, and without speaking a language which men accustomed to these forms can understand (WR Smith, 1923:2).

Moreover, it is important to highlight the fact that the African thought pattern is complex and well developed enough to take on matters that require logic, creativity and critical thinking. Thus the African peoples, even in their traditional contexts, are not intellectual neophytes. We may therefore not deny the African peoples any form of truth on the grounds that the idea is too tough for them. On the contrary, it is crucial that we

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'other' than the Europeans. Christianity, according to these early missionaries and the general European presupposition, was not just doing the work of evangelisation. It was also seen as the " mighty lever" to elevate the mind of the 'savage' and the 'primitive' Africans (see Bediako, 1992:230-234; AF Walls, "Black Europeans, White Africans: Some Missionary Motives in West Africa" in D Baker (ed.), *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems of the Church Historian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978:.339-348; and Hinga, T "Inculturation and the otherness of Africans: Some Reflections" in *Inculturation:Abide by the Otherness of Africa and the Africans*. Eds Turkson, P and Wijsen, F. Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij JH KOK, 1994).

[96] See particularly W Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, 1931; and A Lang, *The Making of Religion*, 1909; also significant is EW Smith (ed), *African Ideas of God,* 1950. The importance of Smith's work is that it draws from the conclusions of several researches conducted in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

understand the African cosmology in order that we may use it to interpret the message from outside. Placide Tempels underscored the seriousness of this point when he warned that: "If we do not employ as our interpreter the forms of Bantu thought to propagate our truths, Bantu philosophy will fall back upon itself and the rift between African and white will suffer further cleavage, becoming wider and wider" (Tempels, 1959:117).

AF Walls calls this phenomenon in which the conceptual vocabulary of the culture of reception is used to convey a Christian idea "symbol theft" (Walls, 1997:149). This concept of "symbol theft" originally came from Origen who argued that the Christians must make use of the resources in the heathen world and employ them for the worship and glorification of God (Origen, *Philokalia* xii, 2). In "symbol theft" the proselyte model is abandoned in favour of the convert model. Highlighting the difference between the proselyte model and the convert model, Walls writes:

> To become a proselyte is to give up one set of beliefs and customs and take up those of another people. To become a proselyte involves the sacrifice of national and social affiliations. It involves a form of naturalization, incorporation into another milieu. But once the transition has been made, all the norms of conduct are set out; the way forward is safe. Precedent is built into the proselyte model; the proselyte inherits the accumulated experience of others.
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> To become a convert, in contrast, is to turn, and turning involves not a change of substance but a change of direction. Conversion, in other words, means to *turn what is already there in a new direction.* It is not a matter of substituting something new for something old – that is proselytizing, a method which the early church could have adopted but deliberately chose to jettison. Nor is conversion a matter of adding something new to something old, as a supplement or in a synthesis. Rather Christian conversion involves redirecting what is already there, turning it in the direction of Christ. That is what the earliest Jerusalem believers had already done with their Jewish inheritance. Turning that inheritance toward Messiah Jesus transformed the inheritance but did not destroy its coherence or its continuity. On the contrary, it produced a model of thought and life that was Christian because Jesus was at its center; yet it remained essentially and inalienably Jewish (Walls, 1997:148).

Thus when we as Africans become Christians, our African inheritance is transformed but not destroyed. It is this inheritance that is then redirected in the direction of Christ. We therefore need to know the nature of our African inheritance, but such knowledge will only help us to explain better our Christian faith. For instance this chapter deals with the

African metaphysics. We do not study how the African peoples construct their reality in order to offer the theology of the African traditional religions. Our purpose is to make available the native cultural and intellectual resources with which we may give the Christian faith better grounding and clarification.[97]

7.2 The African Conceptual Framework as a Reality

The question, what is African cosmology/philosophy, or simply, how does an African organise the totality of his experience, has generated a lot of interest, as is evident in recent philosophical and anthropological writings. These writings are largely preoccupied with, as Imbo has well noted, "... discussions of whether an African cosmology/philosophy exists, how it is to be defined, what distinguishes it from Western philosophy, whether it is oral or written, and whether it can be accessible to non-Africans or is so unique that only Africans can understand it" (Imbo, 1998:xi). Different participants in this debate have brought into the discussions different responses and underlying assumptions about the nature of African cosmology/philosophy. It is because of these different responses and underlying assumptions that African cosmology/philosophy has been defined and classified in different ways.

The way the African organises his reality has traditionally been classified according to the scheme of Henry Odera Oruka, which identifies four categories of African philosophy.[98] The categories are ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and Professional philosophy. The other classification, which has

[97] In taking such a view we are aware that we will be criticised for refusing to accept the African traditional religions in their own terms. It is not that we are not taking the African traditional religions seriously; we are, and that is why we believe the African Christian must understand the dynamics of the African traditional religions. What we are saying is that an African Christian has converted from the African traditional religion; the African traditional religion is his previous religion. Understanding how the African religion operates helps him in a different direction—to clarify the nature of his new faith. As a Christian, there is therefore no way I can suspend my evangelical motive when dealing with the African traditional religions.

[98] Prof. HO Oruka's " Four Trends in Current African Philosophy", a paper presented at the William Amo Symposium in Accra, Ghana, July 24-29,1978 gives a clear presentation and definition of each of the four trends of the scheme. The other place where he has given a considerable attention to this scheme and an elaborate definition of each of the four trends is his *Sage Philosophy,* 1990:1-10.

some significant following, is the tripartite scheme offered by Samuel Oluoch Imbo, himself a former student of Henry Odera Oruka. According to Samuel Oluoch Imbo there are three trends in African philosophy, namely the ethnophilosophical approaches, Universalist definitions and the hermeneutical orientations (Imbo, 1998:34-37).

The interest of this research falls in the category of African philosophy which Henry Odera Oruka calls "ethnophilosophy" and which is known to Samuel Oluoch Imbo as "ethnophilosophical approaches". Our reason for interest in ethnophilosophy is that the African theology which we are dealing with is recognised as part of that literary movement which believes that the Africans are rational human beings, and that they have a right to put their thoughts differently. This is also the focus of ethnophilosophy, and so in a sense African theology is a subsection of the larger literary movement called the ethnophilosophy.[99]

The writers of the brand of the African philosophy which became known as ethnophilosophy[100] were, as Tienou has clearly noted,

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[99] Tienou in his article "The Right to Difference", *AJET* 9:1(1990) has noted that African theology and "Bantu philosophy" have the same preoccupation; viz "... the rediscovery of African identity and the recapture of historical initiative" (Tienou, 1990:31). Tienou argues here that since notable African philosophers are also theologians/Churchmen (P Tempels; JS Mbiti and A Kagame, for instance), it is clear that African theology should not be studied without African philosophy (ibid.).

[100] Ethnophilosophy is a term coined by the opponents of a group of poets, philosophers, anthropologists and theologians. Some well known thinkers who have been classified as ethnophilosophers are Placide Tempels (His book, *Bantu Philosophy,*1945 ignited the debate about African philosophy. In this book Tempels takes the view that philosophy is a collective property of all the individuals in a culture, it is their lived experience. His method is to extrapolate to the Bantu and the African what he observes among the Baluba of the lower Congo.), Alexis Kagame (articulates a philosophy very similar to that of Tempels. He studied the Kinyaruanda laguage to work out a philosophy of being. His chief contribution is in the conclusion that people who speak the same language share abstract philosophical concepts. Kagame expresses these thoughts in *La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'etre, 1956* and in *"Aperception Empiriquede Temps,* 1976. See also detailed analysis of Kagame's thoughts in Apostel's *African Philosophy,* 1981 and in Imbo, *An Introduction to African Philosophy,* 1998), *John* S Mbiti (he takes an approach that is ethnophilosophical in a straightforward sense, see especially his *African Religions and Philosophy,* 1969), Cheickh Anta Diop (see his *Precolonial Black Africa,* 1987), Leopold Sedar Senghor (he posits for Africans, and indeed for all Black people, a different way of apprehending the world. For him there must be a distinctly African epistemology with its own methodology of comprehending reality. See his *On African Socialism,* 1964), and Ogotemmeli (he is a sage of the Dogon people of the Southern Mali, his contribution is in the exposition of the Dogon mythological thinking. In 1933 he had 33 days of conversation with a French ethnologist Marcel Griule. This conversation resulted in a book by Griule, *Conversations with Ogotommeli, 1946).* All these thinkers treat the indigenous cosmologies as philosophy

> ... motivated by the desire to include the Africans in the category of rational human beings. For this the different writers appealed to the Africans' right to difference. Their thought, though not Western, was nevertheless rational. Their philosophy though different and collective, was no less philosophical than the works of Western thinkers. The proponents of African Personality, *Negritude*, Bantu philosophy, and African cultural unity all seem to posit a general and collective African thought (Tienou, 1990:29).

Whereas Tienou has given the motive for and the historical context of the rise of ethnophilosophy, it is Imbo who has given us its identity. According to Imbo:

> The core of ethnophilosophy is its function as a descriptive anthropology. In contrast to a discursive, analytical philosophy, ethnophilosophy treats as philosophy the indigenous cosmologies, the traditional beliefs such as those about supernatural beings and magic. Beliefs, myths, and cosmology are believed to be interwoven into the complex ritual practices that are the manifestation of philosophy. Though unwritten and unsystematized, the rituals and systems of belief nevertheless form an intricate web that guides the people in making sense of their lives. Through the description of the rituals and beliefs, the cosmology and the religious worldview of the people can be reconstructed (Imbo, 1998:55).

As Tienou has well noted, ethnophilosophy, whether of the African personality and the *Negritude* nuance on the one hand, or of the Bantu philosophy and the African cultural unity nuance on the other hand[101] "all seem to posit a general and collective African thought" (Tienou, 1990:29). That there is a general and collective African thought has not really been admitted by the Universalist trend in African philosophy.[102] However, to

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and see the philosophers' task as consisting of laying bare the belief systems and ethnological concepts.

[101] The African philosophers seem to be dividing ethnophilosophy into two distinct categories, the writings which discuss the Bantu Philosophy or the African cultural unity philosophy on the one hand (Tempels, Kagame, Mbiti, Diop, and Ogotemmeli) and the writings which expose the *Negritude* movement or the concept of the African Personality (Senghor and Cesaire) on the other hand. Whereas the writers of the Bantu Philosophy seem to be cheering the African cosmology as a breakthrough, a unique and collective African way of interpreting reality, the *Negritude* writers locate the discovery elsewhere - it is to be found in the way the Negro--African reasons, he/she reasons by soul and emotion. And so for the *Negritude* scholars, the gift of emotion is the centre of the African culture.

[102] The works of Kwesi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin and Henry Odera Oruka generally differ in the details they cover, however they all take the view that philosophy must be an objective and universal enterprise. Their emphasis is that the African thought must take its rightful place alongside the thoughts of the other peoples of the world and consequently it must be free to be involved with logic and other procedures common to all philosophy. Houtondji argues that what makes African philosophy African is not that the philosophy is about some unique African experiences or truths, but rather that it is Africans engaged with universal philosophical problems; see his "Reason and Tradition" in *Philosophy and*

put things in the terms suggested by the Universalists is to overreact. The fact is that there is indeed something unique about African thought forms. This has been forcefully put not just by the ethnophilosophers, but also by African philosophers concerned with the hermeneutical question[103]. The point therefore is that ethnophilosophy is still of great significance in as far as it has the capacity to provide a well considered framework for understanding and explaining Africa's contemporary reality, viz the linguistic, the religious, and cultural aspects of Africa's reality[104].

The African theology views philosophy as a system of beliefs about the various regions of our experience, giving meaning to these different regions and relating them to each other. If philosophy is understood in this way, then as Apostel explains "... the picture drawn by [the ethnophilosophers] is indeed the picture of such a total integration and thus, of a philosophy" (Apostel, 1981:14). African inculturation theology believes that Africa has many peoples and that these peoples view and organise their realities in essentially one and the same way. For African inculturation theology, therefore, Africa in reality does not have 'many' cultures but rather has 'one' culture. The many cultures seen across Africa are, according to this point of view, just 'dialects' of a common

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Cultures, 1983 pp.136-7. For Wiredu, "... there are no African truths only truths -- some of them about Africa" (Appiah, 1992:104, see also Wiredu's *Philosophy and an African Culture;*1980). Odera on his part distinguishes between philosophy in a debased sense and philosophy in a strict sense. Philosophy in a debased sense limits itself to traditional worldviews, while philosophy in the strict sense is concerned with hidden assumptions, implications and contradictions in life. See his *Sage Philosophy,* 1990. For him, the ethnophilosophers are guilty of mistaking culture for philosophy.

[103] The African philosophers in the hermeneutical tradition seem to be the peace brokers between the ethnophilosophers and the so-called professional philosophers. Notable African philosophers in this category are Tsenay Serequeberhan (see his *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings.*NY: Paragon House; 1991), Marcien Towa (see his "Conditions for the Affirmation of a Modern Philosophical Thought" in *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings,* 1991) and Okondo Okolo (see his "Tradition and Destiny: Horizons of an African Philosophical Hermeneutics" in *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings,* 1991). Generally, these philosophers agree that there is something of significance both in the ethnological considerations and in the universalist abstractions, but they insist that philosophy must move beyond preoccupation with these considerations and utilise them in formulating solutions to Africa's contemporary problems.

[104] As Apostel has well explained, it is possible for one to accept the view that philosophy is basically a developed system of deductively related propositions. If one goes by this view, then the ethnophilosophers are mistaken. However, if philosophy is "... a system of beliefs about the various regions of our experience giving meaning to these different regions and relating them to each other, then the picture drawn by [the ethnophilosophers] is indeed the picture of such a total integration and thus, of a philosophy" (Apostel, 1981:14).

culture, 'the African culture'. The basis of this position is the view that the four phyla of the African Negroes are different; however the differences must be seen in the context of historical processes of convergences and reconvergences. Due to the reality of the convergences and reconvergences, any worthwhile scientific study of the African peoples and their languages cannot put emphasis on the diversity of the people and their languages.

7.3 Models of the African Cosmology

7.3.1 Placide Tempels' Model

Renowned ethnophilosophers, such as Alexis Kagame, J Jahn, John S Mbiti and Cheick A Diop in particular, all seem to agree that Tempels, Griaule and Dieterlen made significant contributions to the understanding of the African concept of existence or being. Of course these scholars are not just following Tempels, Griaule and Dieterlen[105]. They themselves have done their own serious research and have, in the face of vilification, come to the side of Tempels and his company, albeit with modifications[106]. Tempels' African cosmology could be put in the following summary form:

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[105]It should be remembered that the study of African cultures which stressed the metaphysical dimension of the African concept of "being" was not only done by Tempels; others who made significant contributions by 1946 are Griaule (see *Conversations with Ogotommeli,* 1948), Dieterlen and Maya Deren. Since the translation of Tempel's book into French in 1945, the book generated more debates than the works of either Griaule or Dieterlen. Consequently, Tempels became the best known of the three. Tempels' book we are using here is the 1959 edition of the original book published in 1945. It should be noted that these four different authors (Tempels—a Belgian monk, 1945; Griaule—a French ethnographer, Ogotommeli – an African sage, 1946; and Maya Daren – an American actor, 1953) came to the conclusion that although the African peoples are different, their conceptual frameworks agree with one another.

[106] Apostel's *African Philosophy* (1981) and Masolo's *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (1994) explain that Kagame was the first African scholar with solid preparation in philosophy and knowledge of the African ways to give Tempels' hypothesis a better grounding. Besides, they observe, he was also an established scholar of Bantu languages. With this background, Kagame was able to uncover the same concepts Tempels proposed even though he used a different approach: the analysis of Bantu languages. J Jahn's book, *Muntu* (1961) adopts the categories of Kagame and sticks to Tempels' concept of force (pp.99 ff.). Mbiti, African *Religions and* Philosophy (1969) sees Tempels' book as having opened "... the way for a sympathetic study of African religions and philosophy" (p.10). Mbiti particularly does not agree with Tempels' idea of "the vital force", but the ontology he proposes (p.16) resembles that of Tempels and Kagame. Diop does not come out clearly in support of Tempels' cosmology, however he vigorously argues from the foundations of an African historiography that Africa is and has always been different, and that

1. The existence or the essence of anything is its being a force. To understand what "force" here means, one has to pay attention to the African peoples' notion of life and death. The African peoples view life and death not as absolute concepts but as relative concepts that are to be seen together. Life in this sense is therefore a dynamic process of increase or decrease in "vital force". Under this system of thought, one enjoys a state of well being when his/her life force is strong and is said to be dying when his/her life force is diminishing. It is in this sense therefore that Temples can say "... force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force". The notion 'force', explains Tempels, replaces for the Bantu 'being' as found in Western ontology (Tempels, 1959:49-55).

2. Every force is specific, thus different beings are characterised by different intensities and types of forces and yet they are in a relationship of interdependence (Tempels, 1959:58-61).

3. Each force can either be strengthened or weakened. "... one force that is greater than another can paralyse it, diminish it or even cause its operation totally to cease, but for all that the force does not cease to exist. Existence which comes from God cannot be taken from a creature by any created force" (Tempels, 1959:57).

4. The universe is a hierarchy of forces or beings according to their strengths. (1) Above all forces is God -- he gives existence to other forces, (2) then come the first fathers and founders of clans - they constitute an important chain binding men to God, (3) then the dead of the tribe, (4) man, (5) animal, (6) vegetable, and (7) mineral (ibid; 63). Beings occupying a higher place in the hierarchy can directly influence beings of lower rank (Tempels, 1959:66-69).

Africans do not need to be embarrassed by that difference (see his *Precolonial Black Africa* (1987).

Tempels believes that the Bantu knows God as "great Muntu", the "great person", the "great, powerful, Life Force" (Tempels, 1959:28). Elsewhere he describes God as a "supreme wise man, who knows all things, who established at the deepest level the kind and nature of their forces. He is force itself, which has force within itself, has made all other beings, and knows all forces" (Tempels, 1959:39).[107]

7.3.2 Alexis Kagame's model

When Alexis Kagame began his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome (1951-1955), Tempels' African cosmology had already created two camps: the pro-Templesians and the anti-Templesians. Whereas the pro-Templesians held that Tempels' ideas about the African cosmology were appropriate and defendable, the Anti-Templesians charged that Tempels had made a bad use of philosophy (Masolo, 1994:84). In view of this debate, the pro-Templesians brought in new African thinkers with solid preparation in philosophy to corroborate and to clarify certain aspects of Tempels' construction of the African cosmology.

Kagame was the first renowned African philosopher to take up this task. Kagame like Tempels, maintains that in the African thought being is force (Tempels, 1959:49-55), that every force is specific (Tempels, 1959:58-61), that each force can either be strengthened or weakened (Tempels, 1959:57), and that the universe is a hierarchy of beings or forces (Tempels, 1959:66-69). His main contribution to an understanding of Tempels' view of the African cosmology, however, is the development of a theory of categories. He does this in two of his fundamental philosophical works: *La Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'etre* (1956) and *La Philosophie bantu comparee* (1976).[108]

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[107] Tempels does not say that the Africans understand God as merely a force. Rather, the Africans view God as the 'great Muntu', the powerful person and force from which all other things flow. 'Muntu' is not merely a force, but it has intelligence and might be described as Mind or a neuter supreme consciousness (see Jahn, 1961:105; cf Parrinder, 1969:27f.). Works of scholars such as PM Steyne, *Gods of power* (1989) which come from the commitment that the 'animists' understand God as force (see pp 40, 41) are therefore way off line.

[108] I was not able to access these books due to limitation in French language. However there is a lot of literature on Kagame's thoughts. Notable and competent works giving full exposition of the two monographs of Kagame are Masolo (1994:84-102); Parrinder (1969:26, 27); Mbiti (1969:10, 11); Jahn

The first book focuses on the Banyarwanda (the Bantu of Rwanda) and explicitly utilises linguistic facts to arrive at the same conclusion as Tempels. The second book basically moves the first work beyond the limitations of Banyarwanda. Here Kagame argues that from concrete evidence, viz linguistic consideration, one can talk with authenticity of a philosophy or a way of conceiving being or existence that belongs to the Bantu in general (see Masolo, 1994:85).[109] That way of conceiving being or existence, Kagame believes, is embodied in the NTU concept[110] that features in four distinct categories or aspects of power in the Bantu thinking.

The categories proposed by Kagame are as follows:

UMUNTU - this category denotes life forces with intelligence (men, spirits, the living dead)

IKINTU - this category refers to subordinated powers of things, objects or simply animals, plants and minerals. All these are of course beings without intelligence

AHANTU - this category describes the power of place and time

(1961:96-120); and Apostel (1981:70-84). Of these authors, the ones I found most thorough are Masolo (1994) and Jahn (1961).

[109] The significance of the linguistic consideration is the view that language and thought are often identified with one another. Historical narratives and peoples' cosmology are contexts and forms of thought. Language is the medium through which the thought is expressed. P Diagne notes, however, that "linguistics can be used to see beyond the evidence of thought, beyond the conceptual apparatus used in a language and the oral or written evidence, to the history of men and their civilization" (Diagne, 1981:233).

[110] Jahn explaining Kagame's concept of NTU says: "NTU is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations:Muntu, Kintu, Hantu, and Kuntu. NTU is Being itself.... NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.... If we said that NTU was a force manifesting itself in man, beast, thing, place, time, beauty, ugliness, laughter, tears and so on, this statement would be false, for it would imply that NTU was something independent beyond all these things. NTU is what Muntu, Kintu, Hantu, and Kuntu all equally are. Force and matter are not being united in this conception; on the contrary, they have never been apart. NTU expresses, not the effect of these forces, but their being" (Jahn, 1961:101).

UKUNTU - this category suggests the manners (modalities) in which power acts (quality, quantity, relation, action, passion, position and possession) (see Masolo, 1994:87; Parrinder, 1969:27; and Mbiti, 1969:11).[111]

Whereas Kagame's ontology gives better grounding to Tempels' hypothesis, it also has its own loopholes. The theologians, in particular, have the feeling that the categories have effectively squeezed out God from the Bantu's intellectual culture. The fact that God is not among the four categories could as well mean that God is not even a NTU (he is outside of being or simply that he is a non-being). However, Kagame addresses this feeling by explaining that the word God is excluded from the categories because it designates a concept which is not distinctly separated from that of UMUNTU - personality (Masolo, 1994:90). God, in this case, is simply understood to be one of the many life forces and therefore not distanced at all from man, spirits and the living dead. Like Tempels, Kagame could call God 'the great MUNTU', "... the powerful person and force from which all other beings flow" (Parrinder, 1969:27).[112]

There is, however, enough evidence advanced by theological thinkers like Mbiti, Idowu, and Setiloane[113] that the majority of the African peoples do not think of God as belonging to the category of UMUNTU. The majority of the African peoples have always viewed God as the source and the basis of existence of everything that is. In that case God is a life force and is UMUNTU (personality) in a different class. God therefore is UMUNTU,

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[111] Kagame (see Apostel, 1981:70-84) explains that UMUNTU and IKINTU relates with the Aristotelian category of substance, AHANTU with the Aristotelian category of place and time, and UKUNTU with the six other Aristotelian categories (quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, position, and possession.).

[112] Since we shall not give specialised attention to Kagame's concept of God, let us give here the most important metaphysical characteristics of God as captured by Kagame. The characteristics are: "(i) God as an external existent: God does not form part of the four metaphysical categories and therefore is on the outside of created or qualified beings –NTU; He is external. (ii) God as the Creator: God is considered as the existent which puts the existence [Fr. *l'exister*] of beings –NTU—there, and confers upon them the property of reproduction and activity. (iii) God as the conserver [Consevateur]: the actual existence of beings is thought to be regulated [begin and end] by his decision" (Masolo, 1994:92).

[113] The next chapter gives detailed analysis of what these three thinkers say regarding the place of God in African cosmology. It is important to note that these are not the only scholars who have works on the African concepts of God. The other notable scholars are JB Danquah (*The Akan Doctrine of God* 1944), EG Parrinder (*African Traditonal Religion*, 1954), EE Evans-Pritchard (*Nuer Religion,* 1956) and G Lienhardt (*Divinity and Experience: the religion of the Dinka,* 1961)

but alongside this affirmation is a strong whisper of 'and he is not'. Because of this whisper, God, according to the African, belongs to a different category altogether. Mbiti in particular has advanced this line of thinking by proposing a cosmology that has incorporated the best of Tempel and Kagame, but which has also taken its point of departure from findings of theological writings and research on the African concepts of God which reveal in clear terms that the African peoples think of the Divine not just as a distinct category but as the category, that explains the reality or existence of the other categories[114].

7.3.3 John S Mbiti's Model

The cosmology Mbiti proposes has the following five categories:

1. *God* as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things.

2. *Spirits,* being made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago.

3. *Man,* including human beings who are alive and those about to be born.

4. *Animals and plants*, or the remainder of biological life.

5. *Phenomena and objects without biological life.*

(Mbiti, 1969:16).

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[114] Mbiti's major contribution to the African cosmology is his inclusion of a separate category for God. His standard presentation of the African reflection about God is his book, *Concepts of God in Africa,* 1970. This book, Mbiti explains, contains "... all the information I could find in writing and otherwise, on African reflection about God" (p.xiii) and besides it covers the concepts of God as found among over 270 ethnic groups of Africa. Mbiti's goal here is to demonstrate beyond Tempels (1959) and Kagame (1956) that the Africans do conceive of God in a substantive manner.

Mbiti believes that this ontology is a complete unity in two senses: First, none of the categories can either be removed or destroyed, and second, there is a thread running through all the five categories. Mbiti explains this unity in the following words:

> To destroy or to remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the Creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart nor get too close to one another. In addition to the five categories, there seem to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is ultimate source and controller of this force, but the spirits have access to some of it, a few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for good and others for the ill of their communities (Mbiti, 1969:16).

A point worth noting here is that Mbiti expresses an ontological hierarchy that is smilar in many ways to those suggested by Tempels, Kagame, Jahn, Mulago, and Bahoken (Masolo, 1994:119, and Parrinder, 1969:25-29). He has, in fact, split Kagame's UMUNTU into three distinct categories, namely God, spirits and man. He has also combined Kagame's UKUNTU and AHANTU into what he calls "Phenomena and objects without biological life" (Mbiti, 1969:16).

However, in contrast to Tempels, Kagame, Mulago and Bahoken, his interest is not in philosophical speculation; rather, he is interested in the experiences of man as the African cosmology situates him at the centre of the universe and how, in every day situations, that man relates to God, spirits, fellow men, animals, plants and the non-biological world. In Mbiti's own words, "... God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the spirits control the destiny of man; man is the centre of this ontology; the animals, plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provides means of existence and if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them" (Mbiti, 1969:16; cf Parrinder, 1969:25-29). Mbiti thus helps us to grasp the idea that this "Originator and Sustainer" is in fact UMUNTU, but of a different kind of existence. He is UMUNTU (personality), but he is not a human being. The African peoples are able to make this distinction because personality in the African nomenclature can describe God, divinities, spirits, the living dead and human beings.

7.4 Conclusion

7.4.1 The Task

The task before us is to process the end results of the historiographies, the anthropological and the linguistic studies that describe the nature of the African intellectual culture. This step is crucial if we are going to take advantage of the conclusions in the construction of theology for the African audiences. The question then is: What have the investigations yielded? To this question, we can advance four responses.

7.4.1.1 The African peoples have a common conceptual framework

Recent historiographies, anthropological and ethnolinguistic studies done by J Ki-Zerbo, P Diagne, JH Greenberg, and D Olderogge and others indicate that the different shades of cosmologies shown here are in fact representative of African patterns of thought.[115] Though different, the cosmologies indicate fundamental similarities. This conclusion significantly buttresses the contributions of the older scholars, such as Tempels, Kagame, Jahn, Mulago, Bahoken, Mbiti and Idowu, who argued for the cultural unity of the African peoples. As early as 1945, Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* emphasised the fact that the African peoples have a common system of making sense of their reality. This observation was also made by Marcel Griaule, Dieterlen and Ogotommêli in *Conversation with Ogotommêli* (1946), and later on by an American actor Maya Deren in *The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953). Kagame and the other African scholars agree with these early observers and, moreover, they have given the necessary academic grounding to their findings. Because of this unity in conceptual framework, it is possible to talk of African metaphysics.

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[115] See the following authors: J Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", in *General History of Africa*, 1981; P Diagne, "History and Lingusitcs", 1981; D Olderogge, "Migration and ethnic and linguistic differentiations", 1981; and JH Greenberg, "African Linguistic Classification", 1981.

7.4.1.2 The African Conceptual Framework is well developed

Individual Africans, regardless of their station, function within an intellectual culture, which is developed enough to take on matters that require logic, creativity and critical thinking.[116] Today, conventional anthropology takes the view that there is no connection between race and intelligence. Moreover, linguistics has now admitted that the theory of language hierarchy, according to which the pure Negro languages settled at the bottom rung of the ladder, had no scientific foundation. Contributing to this debate, UNESCO argues that the only bases for classification are physical and physiological and that there is no scientific evidence that groups of mankind differ in their innate mental capacities (UNESCO, 781:9).

7.4.1.3. 'Being' in the African Conceptual Framework is equivalent to NTU

The way the African peoples conceptualise 'being' is not only logical, but its level of difficulty clearly parallels what we see in Plato and Aristotle. Tempels, for example, recognises that the African peoples explain what the Westerners call 'being' in terms of 'force'. Force therefore, explains Tempels, "... is the nature of being, force is being, being is force". Consequently, Tempels believes that "force" is the African equivalent of what the Western ontology calls 'being' (see Tempels, 1959:49-55). Jahn sticks to Tempels' concept of force but defines it with Kagame's NTU. For Jahn

> Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and must be conceived of not as substance but as force. Man is a force, all things are forces, place and time are forces and the 'modalities' are forces. Man and woman (category Muntu), dog and stone (category Kintu), east and yesterday (category Hantu), beauty and laughter (category Kuntu) are forces and as such are all related to one another. The relationship of these forces is expressed in their very names, for if we remove the determinative the stem NTU is the same for all the categories (Jahn, 1961:100f.).

Force never occurs apart from its manifestations (Tempels, 1959:49-55; cf Jahn, 1961:101), but to the contrary, force and its manifestations, whether matter or modality,

[116] According to Jahn, the African pattern of thought has support from modern science. He explains, "... modern science does in fact conceive the world as a world of forces, although it still grossly underrates the forces of the spirit ... Perhaps African philosophy could even add something of its own to this conception"

have never been apart (Jahn, 1961:101). Force is therefore not just the African equivalent of the Western idea of 'being'. It might be accurate to say, as Kagame's categories make it clear, that force is a substantial quality in some beings. The difference between beings, however, is based on degrees of forces (Tempels, 1959:58-69; Masolo, 1994:88). Thus God, fathers and founders of clans, the dead of the tribe, man, animals and plants, as well as rocks differ because of NTU from the highest to the lowest in that order. Even within a class there are differences. For example, no two men are identical because of genealogy and the fact that in some individuals the force is 'strong' whereas in others it is 'weak'.

7.4.1.4. The African notion of Person is 'Genuine Muntu in Community'

The idea of 'person' as genuine 'muntu in a community' is best captured by the adage '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' – a person is a person through the people (see Mkhatswa, 1994:22). This perspective on person distinguishes 'person' from 'human being'. Humans are not the only beings who can be described as persons. Human beings coexist with a multiple army of invisible 'persons'. These persons have influence on human existence and destiny.

A human being in the African conceptual framework is a union of shadow, body and force (Jahn, 1961:107). When a man dies, his biological life is over, the union of body with force (*magara*; see Jahn, 1961:107) also ceases, but the life force remains. What remains, this life force, is what Tempels calls the "genuine Muntu (person)". This is the basis of the notion that the dead are not dead. According to Louw, it is this "... dynamic power and a vital energy which allow a person to come into contact with ancestors, God and society" (Louw, 1998:79)Tempels says that he "always heard the old men say that man himself goes on existing, he-himself, the little man who sits in hiding behind the outwardly visible form, the muntu that went away from the living ones" (Tempels, 1959:28). When this "genuine Muntu" leaves, it rejoins the community of ancestors and together they continue to influence the living descendants.

(Jahn, 1961:118).

This "genuine Muntu" is also said to be "a tributary of the Supreme Vital Force" (Setiloane, 1986:42). When the Sotho-Tswana talk of person being the tributary of God, they mean, "a person is something divine, sacred, weird, holy" (Setiloane, 1986:13). Because of this understanding of 'person', human beings and a legion of 'persons' invisible to us are treated with a mixture of dignity and fear.

To be person in the African perspective, therefore, is to reveal something of God – the 'genuine muntu' which is a pale reflection of the Ultimate or the Great Muntu (see Idowu, 1965:19). Because of the propensity of tributaries to converge, persons therefore cannot truly exist in isolation. Thus as Mbiti says:

> In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. ... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say:'I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am'. This is a cardinal point in the African view of man (Mbiti, 1969:108f.).

This definition of person persists, as is evident in a recent five-month legal struggle over the burial of a prominent Nairobi advocate, Mr Silvanus Melea Otieno.[117]

> A prominent Nairobi advocate, the leading African criminal lawyer in Kenya, Mr SM Otieno, died suddenly of a heart attack. When his wife had announced plans over the radio to bury her late husband at his farm near Nairobi, his clan objected. His clan claimed that Mr Otieno should not be buried by his wife near Nairobi but by his clan according to customary law at his ancestral home. The protracted legal struggle lasted five months while the body of the deceased lay unburied in the city mortuary. The story became top news in Kenya with thousands crowding the law courts daily and the newspapers giving the story extensive front-page coverage. The story became the chief topic of conversation for thousands. The daily narrative brought suspense and surprise, such as when Mrs Otieno

[117] Although Dr Gehman has given an accurate account of this case, he has not given it the right interpretation. I come from the same village as SM Otieno. As far as the clan was concerned it was not a Kikuyu-Luo tassle, neither was it a wrangle between the customarily law and the common law, as Gehman indicates. It was a question of how the Luo define person and whether the modern African society would give that view a hearing. The success of the case in the Kenyan Court of Appeals indicates that there is nothing repugnant about the Luo definition of person.

> announced that she had been born again. And in the end the Nairobi All Saints Cathedral refused to hold the SM Otieno funeral service at the cathedral as the clan had desired. For five months there were suspense and surprises. At first Mrs Otieno was granted permission by the Judge to bury her late husband but the burial was stopped by a counter injunction from the deceased man's brother. A full trial ensued with the judge awarding burial rights to the clan. Thereafter Mrs Otieno took the matter to the Court of Appeals which handed down its decision five months later, giving the body to the clan for customary burial (Gehman, 1989:15f.).

At the heart of this case was a fundamental question: What is a human being? According to the Luo, a human being is body and soul or simply Umuntu in community of origin. The Luo believe that in the event of death, the soul (*chuny*) continues to live. The Kenyan Court of Appeals was satisfied with the view that if Mr Otieno were not given a decent customary burial by both his wife and his clan his soul (*chunye*) would haunt not just Mrs Otieno and her children but the entire Umira-Kager clan also. The Kenyan Court of Appeals explained that the ruling was not in any way repugnant to justice and morality.

7.4.1.5. God is the starting point of the African Conceptual Framework

Above all forces or forms of existence is God. Tempels describes him as the "great, powerful, Life Force" (Tempels, 1959:28). According to Kagame, he is the first cause of all things or beings – NTU (Masolo, 1994:91). He is therefore not NTU itself, but the "'Great Muntu, First Creator and First Begetter in one" (Jahn, 1961:105). It is therefore logical that in Mbiti's view of the African cosmology, God should be in the number one place since he is the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things (see Mbiti, 1969:16). According to Laurent Magesa, the place God occupies in the cosmology is very important. Because of this place, argues Magesa, "human beings can speak of their own existence, let alone their tradition" (Magesa, 1997:40). The existence of the African peoples is linked to God. Consequently, the traditional African peoples believe that if God does not exist, then the reality outside of him also does not exist. In the words of Idowu, all things would have fallen to pieces if God did not exist (Idowu, 1973:104).

7.4.2. The Challenge

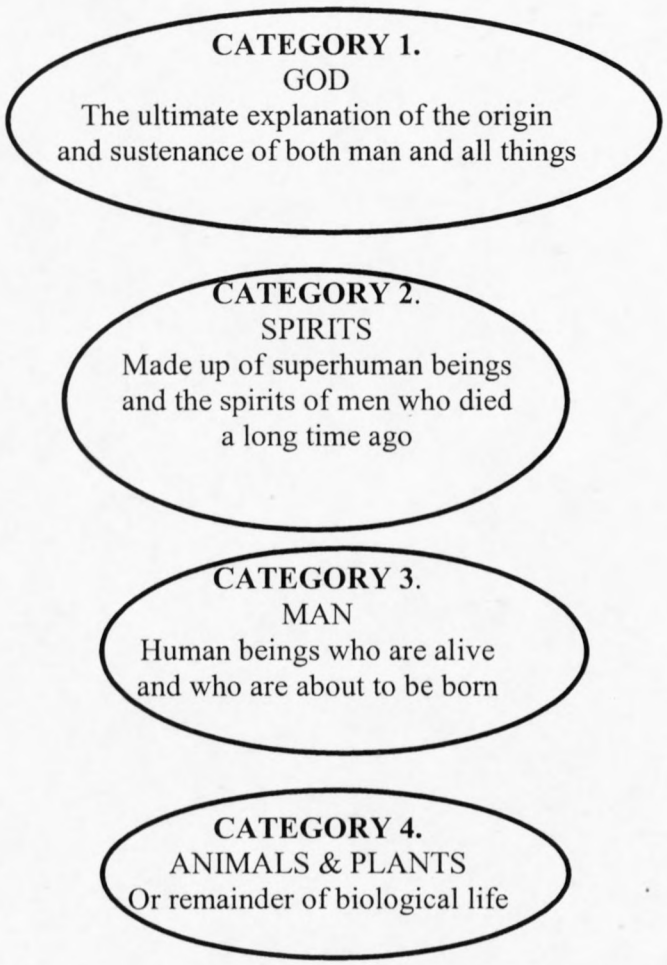
These investigations have yielded the understanding that the African peoples have a common conceptual framework, that the conceptual framework is well developed, that the African peoples understand 'being' in the sense of NTU and 'person' as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and that God is the starting point of that intellectual framework. Therefore, unlike during the missionary period that KS Latourette has called the "the Great Century" [118], when Africa was depicted mainly in negative light, today Africa and her intellectual resources have a place in the global situation. How will this change in perspective and the application of African intellectual resources to theological process affect our formulation of the doctrine of God?

[118] KS Latourette uses this expression to describe the massive missionary efforts in the period between 1800 and 1914. See particularly volume 5 and 6 of his works entitled *A History of Expansion of Christianity (The Great Century: The Americas, Australasia and Africa,* AD 1800-1914; and *The Great Century:North Africa and Asia,* AD 1800-1914)

8. The Notion of God among the African Peoples: The Accounts of JS Mbiti, B Idowu and G Setiloane

8.1. Introduction

The doctrine of God in the African inculturation theology is really an attempt to isolate and understand the divine category of the African cosmology. Once again, in order to understand the divine category of the African cosmology mentioned here, it is important that we produce what we have adapted as the picture of the African cosmology.



CATEGORY 5.
PHENOMENA & OBJECTS
WITHOUT BIOLOGICAL
LIFE

Category 1 of this cosmology is what describes God. So far, the African theology's doctrines of God have been concerned with how to understand God as he is presented in category 1 of the African cosmology, his nature and how he relates to the totality of the cosmology.

This part of the research deals with the concepts of God in Africa deriving from the published works of Bolaji Idowu, John S Mbiti and Gabriel M Setiloane. It should be noted that we used these three as case studies. It is not possible to know all the African theologians who have written on the doctrine of God, and moreover our aim here is to come up with what could be considered as a representative selection of African theologians. No one doubts the significance of Bolaji Idowu and John S Mbiti in the development of African theology.[119] Gabriel M Setiloane could be said to have been a lone voice in South Africa as far as inculturation as a model of theology is concerned. Other African theologians in the South African context preferred Black Theology. Including Setiloane's contribution allows us to see that the need to express the Good News using the infrastructure of the African metaphysics was not just done by the Africans North of the Limpopo, that the Africans in southern Africa also raised their voices.

[119] See the estimation of Idowu and Mbiti in Bediako's book *Theology and Identity*, 1992; cf Olupona and Nyang, 1983 on the significance of Mbiti to African theology.

8.2. B Idowu: The African Concepts of God in Continuity with the Christian Understanding of God

8.2.1. Knowledge of One God is Universal Among the African Peoples

The basic issue that Idowu deals with here, is the knowledge of God. Idowu takes his point of departure from Andrew Lang (*The Making of Religion*, 1909) and Father Wilhelm Schmidt (*The Origin and Growth of Religion,* 1931). This is evident in his article "God", published in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, 1969:18. The two scholars, Andrew Lang and Father Schmidt, are known for their firm stand against Tylor's doctrine of Animism which for a long time was considered as the standard explanation of the origin of religion.[120] As far as Lang is concerned:

> The religion of the Negro may be considered by some as a particularly rude form of polytheism and may be branded with the special name of fetishism. It would follow, from a minute examination of it, that--apart from the extravagant and fantastic traits, which are rooted in the character of the negro, and which radiate therefrom over all his creations-- in comparison with the religion of other savages it is neither very specially differentiated nor very specially crude in form.
>
> But this opinion can be held to be quite true only while we look at the outside of the Negro's religion, or estimate its significance from arbitrary pre-suppositions, as is the case with A Wuttke.
>
> By a deeper insight, which of late several scientific investigators have succeeded in attaining, we reach, rather, the surprising conclusion that several of the *negro races* -- on whom we cannot yet prove, and can hardly conjecture, the influence of more civilized people -- in the embodying of their religious conceptions are further advanced than almost all other savages, so far that, even if we do not call

[120] Tylor's theory of the origin and development of animism and religion goes through the following steps: (1) The primitive forms the first idea of something different from the body. He realises that there is a body, and something else, an incorporeal principle of life, the soul. From the idea of the soul arose the belief in continued existence of the soul after death and in transmigration. (2) Then came the belief that all other things also consist of a body and a soul; in that sense man was therefore related to and not different in nature from the rest of the world. (3) Then there arose ancestor worship. (4) The principle of disembodied spirits was also applied to nature. Various parts of the world was animated by the spirits; thus worship of water, rivers, sea etc. (5) From this developed a higher polytheism. (6) From this we then get the rule of one supreme divinity. (7) Monotheism according to Tylor therefore arises in three ways: (a) raising to divine primacy one of the gods of polytheism; (b) a crowd of gods or pantheon with the king as the supreme deity; (c) the universe may be conceived of as animated by one greatest, all pervading divinity, an *anima mundi* (see Schmidt, 1931:73-77).

> them monotheists, we may still think of them as standing on the boundary of monotheism, seeing that their religion is also mixed with a great mass of rude superstition which, in turn, among other peoples, seems to overrun completely the purer religious conceptions (Lang, 1909:219; italics mine).

At the end of the day, Lang warns against the attitude towards the 'savages' that denies them any religion except "devil-worship" and the bias which leads researchers to look only for "traces of a pure primitive religious tradition" (Lang, 1909:228,229). What researchers must note, explains Lang, is the "reciprocal phenomenon: missionaries often find a native name and idea which answers so nearly to their conception of God that they adopt the idea and name in teaching. Again on the other side, the savages, when first they hear the missionaries' account of God, recognise it ... for what has always been familiar to them" (Lang, 1909:229).

Father Schmidt did his study among the Indo-Europeans, the Amerindians, the Pygmies of the Congo, the Semites, the Southern primitive culture comprising the peoples of southern Africa and those of South East Australia, and the Arctic primitive culture (Schmidt, 1931:185-195; 258-260). His studies led him to the conclusion that belief in and worship of one Supreme Deity is universal among primitive peoples (Schmidt, 1931:257). In his own words: "This Supreme Being is to be found among all the peoples of the primitive culture, not indeed everywhere in the same form or the same vigour, but still everywhere prominent to make his dominant position indubitable" (Schmidt, 1931:257). Thus for Schmidt, the belief in the Supreme Being is therefore not a product of interaction with 'modern' cultures, nor did the so-called primitives borrow it from the missionaries. Rather, belief in the Supreme Being encircles the whole earth like a girdle and it clearly is "an essential property of whatever ancient human culture existed in the very earliest time ... before the individual groups had separated from one another" (Schmidt, 1931:260,261).

Whereas the concept of the Supreme Being as advocated by Andrew Lang and Father Wilhelm Schmidt is central to Idowu's formulation of the doctrine of God, his understanding of revelation is in a way decisive. Of course Schmidt had asserted that

belief in God "encircles the whole earth like a girdle" and that that belief "is an essential property of whatever ancient human culture existed in the very earliest times", but for Idowu the explanation of this widespread and old belief is the Creator God (Idowu, 1965:25). Quoting DeWolf, Idowu writes, "it is God who is directly made known rather than ideas about him" (Idowu, "God", 1969:20), and the God Idowu is talking about here is the God as revealed also in the biblical religion (Idowu, 1965:24), God who "so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to redeem" it (see Jn. 3:16).

> For the Creator Spirit who like a mother bird sat upon the primordial chaos and out of that chaos of non-existence brought forth order, cohesion, meaning and life has certainly left the mark of His creative activity upon the created order. This is the primary stage of revelation -- something through which the Creator is revealed. Then He created man in His own image-- a rational being, intelligent will, someone address-able and therefore responsible (response-able): someone to whom God could communicate His revelation ... and with whose spirit the Divine Spirit could have immediate communication. We can deny this primary revelation only when we rob the created order of its revelatory quality and relieve man of his inherent capability to receive divine communication (Idowu, 1965:19).

Having agreed with Lang and Schmidt on the concept of the Supreme Being, and having opted for the concept of revelation in the terms defined by DeWolf, Idowu arrives at the conclusion that God cannot be confined in any way. "His realm is the whole universe. All peoples are his concern. And he has revealed himself primarily to them all, each race apprehending the revelation according to its native capability" (Idowu, 1965:20; cf 1962:31). According to Idowu, "God is One, not many; and that to the one God belongs the earth and all its fullness. It is this God, therefore, Who reveals Himself to every people on earth and whom they have apprehended according to the degree of their spiritual perception, ... as those who have had practical experience of him" (Idowu, 1962:31). Appealing to the biblical witness, Idowu reasons as follows:

> On the basis of the Bible taken as a whole, however, there can only be one answer. There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them; the God who has never left Himself without witness in any nation, age or generation; Whose creative purpose has ever been at work in this world; Who by one stupendous act of climactic self-revelation in Christ Jesus came to redeem a fallen world (Idowu, 1965:25).

Consequently for Idowu, there has to be what Kwame Bediako has spoken of as "[Idowu's] persistent affirmations of the continuity of God from the African pre-Christian past into the present Christian experience" (Bediako, 1992:281, 284). His study of the African divine names, such as *Olodumare* (Idowu, 1962:30-56), *Orise, Chukwu*, and *Odomankoma* (Idowu, "God", 1969:24-26), indicates two things that are crucial to him. First, the study allows him to conclude that God, as known to the Africans, is not "a loan-God from the missionaries" (Idowu, 1969:29). Second, the study allows him to conclude that the African experience of God comes very close to the biblical understanding. On account of the study of the names *Orise, Chukwu*, and *Odomankoma*, Idowu can without any difficulty connect the words of Psalm 104:29,30 and Acts 17:28 (Idowu, 1969:26).

8.2.2. God is Real to African Peoples

One of the ways by which Idowu underscores the fact that God is real to the Africans is by doing a detailed study of the names by which African peoples call God. In the words of Idowu, "it may not be possible in every case to arrive at the primary meaning of a principal name of the Supreme Being, but the praise names, titles or epithets always throw much light upon the people's ideas" (ibid.25). The point Idowu wishes to make here is well articulated in his *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962).

In *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962), Idowu explores the full range of the meaning of Olodumare and the other names by which the Yoruba call this Supreme Being. The name Olodumare, a Yoruba name for God, carries the idea of "One with whom man may enter into a covenant or communion in any place and at any time, one who is supreme, superlatively great, incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, excellent in attributes, stable, unchanging, constant, reliable" (Idowu, 1962:36). This *Olodumare* is also called *Olofin-Orun* and *Olorun*. According to Idowu, the three names "Olodumare, Olofin, and Olorun are sometimes run together in urgent ejaculation:*L'oju Olodumare! L'oju Olofin! L'oju Olorun!* -- In the presence of Olodumare! In the presence of Olofin! In the presence of Olorun! -- The one deity is thus called by a three-fold name to express intense emotion or urgent appeal" (Idowu, 1962:36,37).

The Yoruba conceive of Olodumare anthropomorphically (Idowu, 1962:21; cf 39). He is the Creator, "the owner of the Spirit", or "the owner of Life" (Idowu, 1962:39,40), even the divinities owe their existence to him[121]. They were either "engendered by Him or they emanated from Him" (Idowu, 1962:62). "He is King" (Idowu, 1962:40); "He is Omnipotent" (Idowu, 1962:40,41); "He is All-wise, All-knowing, All-seeing" (Idowu, 1962:41); "He is Judge" (Idowu, 1962:42); "He is Immortal" (Idowu, 1962:42-46); and "He is Holy" (Idowu, 1962:46,47).

Regarding the problem of the "One and the many" posed by the incidence of the realities of the divinities among many African peoples, Idowu points out that, in some cases, the divinities are in fact later additions (Idowu, 1962:202), and in instances where they have become real he argues that the difficulty exists only for "the casual observer". However, the worshippers who have access to the African religions, know and believe the supremacy of One God (Idowu, 1962:141; cf vii). The attitude of the Yoruba worshipper, for example, is that

> Olodumare has portioned out theocratic administration of the world among the divinities whom He brought into being and ordained to their several offices. By the function of these divinities, and the authority conferred upon them, they are "almighty" within certain limits. But their "almightiness" is limited and entirely subject to the absolute authority of the Creator Himself (Idowu, 1962:49).

In view of the presence of divinities, are we then to view the African religions as polytheistic? As far as Idowu is concerned, polytheism is an inappropriate description of the African traditional religions. He says: "African traditional religion cannot be described as polytheistic. Its appropriate description is monotheistic, however modified this may be. The modification, is, however, inevitable because of the presence of other divine beings within the structure of the religion" (Idowu, 1973:168). Idowu calls this kind of religion "primitive monotheism" (Idowu, 1962:202) or "diffused monotheism",

[121] Note that to the worshipping minds, the divinities are real; in some cases the divinities are but conceptualisations of attributes of Olodumare. There are also those who have outgrown the divinities; to such people, all reality is concentrated on Olodumare (Idowu, 1962:63).

otherwise described as a type of monotheism where "the good Deity delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by Him" (Idowu, 1962:62; cf Schmidt, 1931:262-282). The functionaries may be seen, in the words of Kwame Bediako, as "manifestations or refractions of a single God" (Bediako, 1992:288). Idowu is not the first theologian to use this term in reference to religion in the African context. This term had been in use since the nineteenth century.[122] And so by the time Idowu is talking about "primitive monotheism" or "diffused monotheism" in his *Olodumare:God in Yoruba Belief* (1962), he is not talking about a totally strange concept. Rather, he is giving his own scholarly approval to what other scholars prior to his own time had clearly articulated.

8.2.3. The Concept of God among Other African Peoples

On how the other African peoples understand God, Idowu finds "a common thread, however tenuous in places, running throughout the continent" (Idowu, 1973:103). Two

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[122] The concept of "primitive monotheism" or "diffused monotheism" applied to the African context may be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century. In his book, *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (1870), Henry Callaway talks of *Unkulunkulu* as the Supreme Being and the *Amadhlozi* or *Amatongo* (the throng of sprits worshipped by the Zulu) (Callaway, 1870:1, 3, 26-31). Andrew Lang commenting on Callaway's observation notes that the Zulus recognise one Supreme Being, however they continue to have daily interaction with "serviceable family spirits, who continually provided an excuse for a dinner of roast beef" (Lang, 1909:209-210). Other examples of African peoples who were known to hold "primitive theism" by the beginning of the twentieth century include the Dinkas of Sudan (refer to the Supreme Being as *Dendid*), the Wayao of Central Africa (*Mulungu* or *Mlungu*), the Tshi-speaking peoples of Gold Coast (*Nyankupon*), and the Fiorts (*Nzambi Mpungu*) (ibid.: 211-229). Edwin W Smith's book, *African Ideas of God* (1950) is yet another significant contribution on both the issue of the 'one and the many' as well as on the problem of 'loan God'. Smith and the authors who contributed to this volume are unanimous on the fact that the African peoples in their traditional contexts had ideas of the Supreme Being and that none of those ideas were borrowed from outside. In the mid-1950s and at the beginning of 1960s the problem of the 'one and the many' in the African context once again caught the attention of EE Evans-Pritchard (1956) and G Lienhardt (1961) respectively. In his study of the Nuer of Sudan, Evans-Pritchard had noted that the Nuer believed in the 'Spirit' (*Kwoth*) and 'spirits' (*kuth*). In the words of Evans-Pritchard: "The inference we can draw from this in considering the spirits of the air is that they are not thought of as independent gods but in some way as hypostases of the modes and attributes of a single God... The spirits of the air are, nevertheless, being Spirit, also God. They are many, but also one. God is manifested in, and in a sense is, each of them. I received the impression that in sacrificing or in singing to an air spirit, Nuer do not think that they are communicating with the spirit and not with God. They are, if I have understood the matter correctly, addressing God in a particular spiritual figure or manifestation" (Evans-Pritchard, 1956:49,51).

The study of Godfrey Lienhardt among the Dinka yielded a similar conclusion. "All Dinka assert that Divinity is one, *nhialic ee tok*... Yet *nhialic* is also a comprehensive term for a number of conceptions which differ considerably from each other... This unity and multiplicity of Divinity causes no difficulty in the context of Dinka language and life" (Lienhardt, 1961:56).

reasons can explain this position. In the first place, Idowu, like Schmidt, believes that belief in one God "encircles the whole earth like a girdle and that it 'is an essential property of whatever ancient human culture existed in the very earliest time. .. before the individual groups had separated from one another" (Idowu, "God", 1969:18). This is so because "God's self-disclosure is, in the first instance, to the whole world and that each race has grasped something of this primary revelation according to its native capability" (Idowu, "Introduction, 1969:12; cf 1965:25). In this regard, he agrees with the explanation of HH Farmer (Idowu, "Introduction", 1969:12), who is of course writing about what he understood to be the persistence of monotheism in the context of the 'polytheistic primitives'. Farmer writes:

> a polytheistic form of religious belief was an inevitable stage in the unfolding of man's awareness of, and dealings with, God; nevertheless such polytheism, in so far as there was in it anything of living religion at all, was never so to speak *mere* polytheism: there were powerful monotheistic trends within it, and these we take to bear witness that the one living and personal God was making Himself known, keeping a grip on men, even through a polytheistic scheme of belief and ritual. Moreover, this implicit sense of the one living God, I have suggested, when it became explicit, did so in a form conditioned by the general mental level and by the polytheistic system of ideas; it took the form of a belief in the one High God who is Supreme over all and to whom all other supernatural powers are therefore subject. In this also we can see the self-disclosure of God in a form appropriate to man's stage of development and historical situation. Belief in the High God was the primitive man's way of apprehending, and responding to, and expressing, the self-revealing pressure upon him of the one God (Farmer, 1954:108-109).

Secondly, for Idowu, the phonetic similarities in some of the names for God amongst a variety of African peoples could as well indicate that we are, as a matter of fact, dealing with a variation of the same name. It is easy for him to reach this conclusion since he already believes in one cradle, not only for the African peoples but also for the entire human race, and he is also a firm believer in one God (Idowu, 1965:25). In his book, the *African Traditional Religion* (1973), he takes up the issue of one God and goes on to argue that "in Africa, the real cohesive factor of religion is the living God and that without this one factor, all things would fall to pieces. And it is on this ground, especially this identical concept, that we can speak of the religion of Africa in the singular" (Idowu, 1973:104). For Idowu, the proper names for God, like Yamba which occur in parts of Nigeria and noticed in the form of Yambe, Yembe or Ndyambi in the

Cameroons and the Congo and as Onyame or Nyame among the Akan of Ghana and the Nilotic peoples of the greater Sudan (Idowu, 1973:103-104; cf 1969:26; cf Smith, 1950:157), cannot just be explained by coincidence. However, he is not the only one who has noticed this word for God. Smith commenting on Nyambe, has noted that the name appears in:

> ... its various forms: Nzambi, Nyambe, Ndyambi, Dzambi, Tsambi, Yambe, Sambi, Zam, Monzam etc. This God's name is spread over a very large area of Western Equatorial Africa, from the Cameroons to the Northern border of Bechuanaland, and from the Atlantic Coast to the middle regions of Belgian Congo. ... The name is used in at least twenty-five versions of the Holy Scripture (Smith, 1950:156).

The concern of Idowu is clearly not just phonetics. He wants to state categorically that all the African peoples have an identical concept of God. The variation of the same name indicates that though each ethnic group used the name for deity that was part of the vocabulary of that community, the African peoples believed that the same God extended beyond any territory to the whole world.

Idowu is thoroughly frustrated by the "too many stay at home investigators" and those who go out into the field and "often find it difficult to leave at home their own preconceived notions" regarding their own theory of "the high gods of the primitive peoples" (Idowu, "God", 1969:18,19). As far as Idowu is concerned, "these scholars have furnished us with an unnecessary, artificial pluralism. For they do not hesitate to concede to each nation, people, or 'tribe', its own 'high god', with the result that the whole place is overrun with 'high gods' of various brands" (Idowu, "God", 1969:19). To say that the "whole place is overrun with 'high gods' of various brands" is, in the opinion of Idowu, to make a grave error of theological judgement. Only one God has revealed himself to all peoples of the world and the various African peoples have apprehended the revelation of this God according to their respective native capabilities (Idowu, "God", 1969:20). Moreover, from the position of the anthropologists and ethnolinguists, one cannot simply look at the African peoples as tribes and therefore simply train focus on the diversity of the African peoples. To do this is to miss the scientific significance of the

historical processes of convergence and reconvergence of the major phyla of the African Negroes.

8.3. JS Mbiti:African Concepts of God as *Preparatio Evangelica*

8.3.1. Preliminary Comments

In his works, Prof Mbiti seeks to indicate that the African concepts of God could be viewed as *preparatio evangelica.* He demonstrates his point by employing a series of metaphors that traditional African societies employ to talk about the divine. The metaphors used by Mbiti range from simple anthropomorphic descriptions to theriomorphic and physiomorphic descriptions of the divine. The basic premise of Mbiti's methodology is that traditional Africa and the early Israelites had a lot in common. For Mbiti, this could mean that traditional Africa shared with the early Israelites the verbal cotext[123] of the metaphors used to describe the divine. In other words, as far as Mbiti is concerned, the traditional Africa and the early Israelites cherished the same concepts of God, used the same metaphors to describe the divine, and systematized the concepts and metaphors into comparable theologies. In order to demonstrate his point, Mbiti isolates a large number of terms, metaphors and similes used to describe God in traditional Africa and uses them in a way that reminds us of their occurence in the Old Testament.[124]

[123] Verbal cotext refers to "the users' sign-context that act as a rule narrowing down the meaning of metaphors and similes employed" (Korpel, 1990:79).

8.3.2. Traditional Africa's Anthropomorphic Descriptions of God

8.3.2.1.Human Properties

8.3.2.1.1. The Body

God is generally viewed as a person with a spiritual body and will (Mbiti, 1969:37), however nobody has seen him and as a matter of fact it is fatal to see God (Bambuti, the Lugbara) (Mbiti, 1970:25; cf Mbiti, 1975:48). Since God is known to be a person, every African language and people has a personal name for him (Mbiti, 1975:43). He has a personality, and in this personality there is a will that governs the universe (Mbiti, 1969:37). He has eyes, mouth and saliva, nose, ears, beard, wings, belly and blood. Thus God wills, sees, speaks, eats, smells, and hears. People of one ethnic group see themselves as one because they all have "one continuous blood from the originating blood of the great source of that blood" (Mbiti, 1970:95).

The African peoples do not view God as having a material body, rather he is believed to be a spiritual being and as such some peoples simply call him "the Great Spirit, the Fathomless Spirit, the Ever-present Spirit or the God of wind and Breath" (Mbiti,

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[124] But in doing this, isn't Mbiti creating an African image of God which in actual fact exists nowhere in Africa? It is true that Mbiti has been accused of pasting bits and pieces together taken from all over Africa. This view was articulated by Okot p'Bitek. As far as p'Bitek is concerned, African scholars such as Mbiti, Idowu, Danquah, Busia, Kenyatta and Sengor are "intellectual smugglers" who have draped the African gods in "awkward Hellenic garments". He adds that "the African deities of the books ... are creations of students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside" (p'Bitek, 1971:7, 46, 47, 50, 80, 88). Given his attitude to Christianity, can p'Bitek's criticism of the African scholars' opinion on what the African peoples make of God be accepted without validation? Okot p'Bitek, for example, denies that the traditional African ever knew anything about a Creator God and believes that this is the result of missionaries' soliciting (ibid.:62), if he slipped on this, why should we believe the previous claim? Is it not true that God who is not a Creator God is the creation of p'Bitek and is "... beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside"?

In my opinion, p'Bitek's criticism of Mbiti and the other African scholars is unfair. Mbiti, like Idowu and Danquah, is interested in demonstrating the fact that the African peoples too had something of the self-revelation of God. Moreover, the notion of 'pasting bits and pieces taken from all over Africa' assumes a fundamental diversity of the African Negroes, an argument which modern anthropologists, ethnolinguists and African historiographers have taken issue with (see the Prologue of this research). The diversity of the African peoples is a fact that must be accepted, however it should not be accepted at the expense of the fundamental unity of the African Negroes, which is a direct result of the historical processes of convergence and reconvergence.

1975:53). As spirit, no one can make an image of him. In the words of Mbiti, "there are no images or physical representations by African peoples, this being one clear indication that they consider him to be a spiritual being" (Mbiti, 1969:34). Neither can God be confined to space and time. He is the 'Great Spirit', the 'Creating Spirit and the Saving Spirit' and the 'Protecting Spirit' who made all the spirits in the universe (the Shona, the Ashanti, the Ewe, the Kagoro). He is like wind; he comes and goes (the Ga, the Bena, and the Banyarwanda). The Nuer word for God is spirit; thus they believe his essence is spirit. It is the spirit of God who empowers the rainmakers and the medicinemen (Mbiti, 1970:23,24). Thus the African peoples admit that they know some of the activities and manifestations of God, but nothing of his essential nature (Mbiti, 1969:35; cf 1975:53).

The spirits of people who were once leaders, heroes, warriors, clan founders and other outstanding personalities go through some form of *theosis* and are pictured as being close to God (Mbiti, 1975:72). As the prominent personalities die, they step up into a spiritual status that points in the direction of more and more association with God. This is the reason prominent personalities ascend to the level of intermediaries without question.

8.3.2.1.2. Intellectual Capacities

God knows, thinks and remembers all. He is the wise one (Zulu, Banyarwanda, and Yoruba). The rationale for worship and sacrifices is so that God may remember and if he wills, change his mind. The Nuer thinks that God created the universe through thought and imagination (Mbiti, 1970:97). Man is wise but only in a limited way, absolute wisdom belongs to God and is part of his nature (Mbiti, 1970:3). In order to show the idea of omniscience clearly, the African peoples "speak of God as the All-seeing and the all-hearing, the Watcher of everything, the All-seer, and the Discerner of hearts" (Mbiti, 1975:50). Wisdom, in the words of Mbiti, commands great respect in the African societies. Therefore, to say that God knows all things is to confer upon God the highest possible place of honour and respect (Mbiti, 1969:30). God also has a will that governs the universe and the fortunes of mankind, and against this will man can do nothing (Mbiti, 1969:37).

8.3.2.1.3. Emotions and morality

God is said to be merciful and kind (the Akamba, the Banyarwanda, the Ila, the Herero and others). As a general rule, he exercises his will justly. For many peoples, God is always right (Mbiti, 1969:37, 38). He cannot be charged with offence. His kindness and mercy are known and experienced in situations of difficulty. God rejoices, and his smile is the reason for good health and prosperity, whereas his displeasure can only bring misfortunes, sickness, and death (Mbiti, 1970:97). He is essentially good. He averts calamities, provide rain, and causes people, animals and the fields to be fertile (Mbiti, 1969:37). He is holy, and he loves (Mbiti, 1969:38; cf 1975:48-50).

8.3.2.1.4. Moving and Working

God is the strong one (Yoruba, Ngombe), he is irresistible (Zulu), able to alter the natural laws and destroy completely both people and objects (the Abaluhya, the Shona). He is the source of power (the Akan, the Ashanti). God commands the created world and they obey (the Bambuti, Banyarwanda). Even the rulers and the moral codes get their powers from God, he is the one "who gives or breaks dignities" (Banyarwanda, Zulu, the Lugbara) (Mbiti, 1970:8-11; cf 1975:50). In the African mind, power is viewed "hierarchically in which God is at the top as the omnipotent, beneath him are the spirits and natural phenomena, and lower still are men who have comparatively little or no power at all" (Mbiti, 1969:32).

Although God is understood to be powerful in the absolute sense, he is perceived to be capable of condescending and coming within reach of man. He eats and drinks. This provides the basis for offerings and sacrifices. God plays, sleeps and walks. There are specially designated places where the divine rests; mountains and clouds (the Shona and the Agikuyu). God's rest may take the form of either sleep or recuperation (the Nandi). When he is asleep he does not answer prayers and requires mediation (the Karamoja) (Mbiti, 1970:95-96; cf 1975:48).

8.3.2.2.Social Relations

8.3.2.2.1. Other divinities and demigods

God is all alone. He has no companions (the Herero, the Agikuyu). Other peoples have the concept of the 'one but many' (the Shilluk and the Vugusu). Mbiti discusses this phenomenon as the divinities and the demigods. The Yoruba has a pantheon of divinities, the *abosom* through whom God manifests himself. Other communities also have pantheons of divinities.[125] As far as Mbiti is concerned the idea of divinities and demigods has nothing to do with what could be considered polytheism in the African traditional religions. For Mbiti, the African traditional religions are monotheistic. Rather, what have been described as divinities and demigods are "personifications of God's activities and manifestations"; they could also rightly be called nature spirits, deified heroes, and mythological figures (Mbiti, 1970:117) who function as intermediaries between God and man (Mbiti, 1975:63). According to Mbiti,

> ... the idea of the intermediaries fits well with the African view of the universe, which holds that the invisible world has its own life and population. The life of this invisible world is in some way higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person (Mbiti, 1975:63).

This explanation is close to the position of Bolaji Idowu as well as to the understanding of KA Busia. According to Bolaji Idowu, the divinities and demigods can be conceived of as manifestations of Olodumare, His "ministers, looking after the affairs of the universe and acting as intermediaries between Him and the world of men" (Idowu, 1962:62). Busia explains that:

> There is the Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, who created all things, and who manifests his power through a pantheon of gods; below these are lesser spirits which animate trees, animals, or charms; and then there are the ever present spirits

[125] The other communities which have a concept of the divinities are the Bakene, the Babuti, the Banyoro, the Barundi, the Basoga, the Dinka, the Edo, the Fon, the Ga, the Ganda, the Gofa, the Idoma, the Igbo, the Indem, the Itsekiri, the Mao, the Songhay, the Suk, the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, the Teso, the Tumbuka, the Vugusu, the Walamo, the Ashanti, the Zinza and the Zulu (Mbiti, 1970:117-121)

of the ancestors (*nasamnafa*), whose constant contact with the life of man on earth brings the world of the spirits so close to the land of the living (Busia, 1963:191).

8.3.2.2.2. Family

God is viewed as the universal creator-father. "Over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God" (Mbiti, 1969:39). The metaphors used in this regard include excavator, hewer, carver, creator, originator, inventor, architect, potter, fashioner (Mbiti, 1975:44). God alone is described as the one who fathered the world, owns it and cares for it and before he fathered the world there was nothing. Moreover, he is the unfathered Father of the divinities, of the forefathers and of all men, but he is distinct from the divinities, men and the forefathers because he is not one of them. Being unfathered father means that he is understood to be self-existent. "He is made by no other, no one beyond him is" (Bacongo). He was the first, has always been in existence and will never die. He came of Himself into being. He is he who speaks by himself, thus he is the speaker and the hearer, subject and object at one and the same time (the Bambuti, the Banyarwanda, the Zulu, and the Bena) (Mbiti, 1970:19,20).

He is also known to be a personal father to whom men may turn. What he created he sustains, provides for and rules over (Mbiti, 1975:44-46).[126] Besides his relationship with man and the rest of the creation as father - creator, God is also said to have a family of his own, with him either as the head of the family or as an elder brother. The Dogon talk of Nommo, 'the Son of God'. The Ganda talk of God and his two sons but they also believe that God is the father of gods. Other communities view God as having either a younger brother (the Bari, the Tiv, the Vugusu, and the Suk) or a younger sister (the Dorobo) (Mbiti, 1970:114-116).

[126] Whereas the traditional Africa generally think of God as father, a few communities with matrilineal system of descent (the Nuba, the Ovambo, and the Shona) refer to God as mother (Mbiti, 1970:91-93; cf 1975:47)

8.3.2.2.3. Balance of power

The African peoples with strong monarchical systems of governance view God as King and Lord.[127] God is the Great King who reigns over and owns all things, visible and invisible; has absolute power; maintains order in the sky, earth and underworld; may not be approached directly but only via intermediaries (Mbiti, 1970:71-73). Since God is King and Lord, he is also viewed as Master, thus he controls the destinies of all things (the Banyarwanda, the Shongay, the Barundi), helps and teaches (the Banyarwanda, the Ganda, the Baluba, the Barotse, the Meru, the Shilluk, the Tswana, the Vugusu, the Mende, the Tiv, the Lodagaa), and moreover, he gives material things, as well as life as the most precious gift (Mbiti, 1970:73-76).

God is also associated with justice, punishment and retribution. He is the ultimate dispenser and judge, thus he gives to each person his own portion, punishes those who commit wrong, intervenes in human affairs. God punishes individuals through illnesses, calamities, misfortune, barrenness, or death. God's help is sought during war and in almost every case, among the peoples with divinities, there is at least one divinity of war (the Ankore, the Banyoro, the Ga, the Ganda, the Itsekiri and the Yoruba) (Mbiti, 1970:76-79).

8.3.2.2.4. Misfortune, disease and death

For some reason, many African peoples attribute afflictions to God. He is thus thought to be either causing afflictions, allowing them to happen or in some way connected with them. God is thought to cause epidemics, calamities, destruction, death, pests, and cattle diseases (the Ambo, the Azande, the Bambuti, the Bongo, the Bavenda, and the Suk). In some cases, the personifications of God may be responsible for certain types of afflictions. The personifications or the manifestations of God are known to send smallpox, spiritual illnesses, bubonic plague, and death (Mbiti, 1970:80-87). Whereas

[127] This is seen among the Banyarwanda, the Barundi, the Edo, the Baluba, the Twi, the Akan, the Bachwa, the Babuti, the Indem, the Ngoni, the Agikuyu, the Yoruba, the Zulu, the Bena, and the Chagga, among others (Mbiti, 1970:71-73).

God is associated with afflictions, he is also known to be the deliverer and saviour from evil. He always delivers those in trouble, the ill, the poor and the weak (Mbiti, 1970:82,83).

8.3.2.3.Accessories of Life

8.3.2.3.1. Habitation

God is self-existent. He is of himself. He came of himself into being (the Zulu, the Bambuti, and the Agikuyu). Beyond this God there is nothing. God "is the most abundant reality of being, lacking no completeness (Mbiti, 1969:33; cf 1975:52). He transcends all boundaries; He is omnipresent everwhere and at all times (Mbiti, 1975:51). He even defies human conception and description; He is simply 'the Unexplainable', as the Ngombe like to call him" (Mbiti, 1969:33). Like water, air and wind, God's presence is met everywhere at once (the Karanga, the Bena, the Kono). His presence stretches beyond human imagination. He is a being in the wind, invisible but there for sure (the Lango, the Nuer, the Shilluk) (Mbiti, 1970:5,6; cf 1969:31). According to the Ila, the omnipresence of God is captured by the saying "God has nowhere or nowhen, that he comes to and end" (Mbiti, 1969:31).

Although God is present everywhere simultaneously, certain objects, events and phenomena are particularly associated with the presence of God. The Gikuyu, the Lango, the Xhosa and the Sonjo associate the presence of God with hills and mountains. The Banyarwanda associate the presence of God with "every terrifying place", the Herero with rain, lightning and thunder, while the Gisu, Ganda and Amba associate his presence with a cock that is supposed to be seen when there is lightning. God's manifestations are also said to be in dangerous situations such as fighting, journeys, and encounters with wild animals, and people are cautioned to avoid such situations (Lango). God's presence is also manifested in the sexual encounter between a wife and a husband, and thus is the explanation for conception (Mbiti, 1970:7,8).

8.3.2.3.2. Time

However, in terms of time, God is seen as a being in and beyond the past, yet he is there now and men can reach him. He is there now as from ancient times, he endures forever (the Akan, the Tonga), he antedates the forests, and he thunders from the beginning (Ngombe, Zulu). Thus God is transcendent beyond all things in temporal comparison (Mbiti, 1970:12,13). But whereas he is temporally transcendent, he is also quite immanent. He stretches over and beyond the *zamani* period, yet he is so near and close to men (Mbiti, 1969:32). In his immanence, he could be dangerous (the Lugbara, the Turu, and the Lango), thus people avoid close proximity with the divine. Although God is conceived as immanent, there is no evidence of pantheism (Mbiti, 1970:16,17).

8.3.3. Other Traditional African Descriptions of God

8.3.3.1.Theriomorphic Descriptions

The Old Testament occasionally uses the picture of mammals (the bull -- Gen. 49:22-26, Num. 23:22, 24:8, and the lion -- Hos. 13:7f cf 2 Sam. 17:8, Prov. 17:12, Lam. 3:10), birds (Deut. 32:11, Ex. 19:4, Psa. 91:4, Isa. 31:5) and winged creatures like the cherubim (Psa. 18:11, II Sam. 22:11) and the seraphim (Isa. 6, Isa. 14:29, Ezek. 1 cf Ezek. 11:22f) to describe God. The African peoples occasionally describe God theriomorphically. Generally, the African peoples understand that God gave animals to man and caused them to be under the power of man either as brothers or as food, however there are instances where animals are used either as metaphors of God or as his manifestations.[128]

8.3.3.2.Physiomorphic Descriptions

According to traditional African views of reality, what we regard as the inanimate and neutral physical reality, could harbour divine presence. Under consideration here are cosmology; geology, geography and hydrology; trees and plants; and natural phenomena.

8.3.3.2.1. Cosmology

In the words of Mbiti, practically all the two hundred and seventy peoples he studied in his *Concepts of God in Africa (*1970) associate God with the heavens, sky or firmament. A number of African peoples understand that God lives in the heavens or the sky. Some peoples personify the sun and view it as a divinity (the Amba, the Azande, the Fon, the Meban, the Sandawe, the Akan, the Nandi, and the Afasure among others). Mbiti makes it clear, however, that in spite of the personifications and the rather loose associations, he never came across a situation where the sun was considered to be God and God to be the sun (Mbiti, 1970,129-134)

The moon is also personified and considered to be a divinity by some peoples (the Akan, the Amba, the Fon, and the Sandawe). A number of peoples associate the moon with God in different ways. The moon is one of the two eyes of God (the Balese, the Sidamo), it symbolises God (the Turu), it has the signs of God (the Watumbatu), it belongs to God and God shines in it (the Nuer). Observance of the new moon is reported among many peoples (the Banyoro, the Nuer, the Ingassana) (Mbiti, 1970:134-137).

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[128] In the following instances, animals like the buffalo (the Lango), the zebra (the Shona), the lion (the Turu), the leopard (the Lango), the hyena (the Lugbara, the Turu), the sacred snakes (the Banyoro, the Bari, the Bemba, the Gisu, the Turu, and the Zala), and the eagle (the Herero, the Bavenda) are used as metaphors of God. There are also instances where theriomorphic animals received sacrifices either because they are considered manifestations of God, or because they are his messengers and therefore they are close to him. Cases in point are the mantis (the Lesotho Bushmen), the snakes (the Zulus), the hyenas (the Giryma) (Mbiti, 1970:98-108).

8.3.3.2.2. Geology, Geography and hydrology

Rain is generally viewed as a gift of God and the ultimate good, thus if it does not rain then God is said to be meting out his punishment. In the words of Mbiti, the view that rain is a "source of happiness, the basis of man's physical security, and a symbol of spiritual well-being and social order" (Mbiti, 1970:137) can be applied to all African peoples. Some peoples personify rain, thus viewing it as a divinity (the Bushmen, the Elgeyo, the Igbo, the Suk, among others), whereas others closely associate God with rain (the Beir, the Didinga, the Idoma, the Iyala, the Maasai, the Nuba, the Suk and the Piti) and sometimes rain is seen as a manifestation either of God himself or of his power (the Nuer, the Agikuyu, the Tiv, the Ila) (Mbiti, 1970:137-139).

Thunder is said to be produced by God (the Herero, the Kuku, the Lokoiya, the Suk and the Zulu) and a manifestation of his immanence. Thus God is said to thunder (the Ila) and in some cases thunder is described as God's manifestation (the Nuer, the Shona), his movement (the Agikuyu, the Zulu, the Ila) and a manifestation of his anger and power (the Tiv, the Watumbatu, the Yoruba) (Mbiti, 1970:139-141). Hurricanes, hail and thunderstorms are generally viewed as manifestations of God's anger and may indicate that God is arming himself (the Shona, the Tonga, the Zulu, the Watumabatu, the Yoruba, the Bambuti, the Tswana, the Zulu) (Mbiti, 1970:142).

Some peoples use wind to describe some aspects of God. His omnipresence, in particular is described using the metaphor of wind. Thus he is described as being like moving air or wind (the Lango, the Ga, the Shilluk, the Vugusu). High wind may be considered as either a manifestation of God (the Turu), a vehicle by means of which God travels in great power (the Bavenda) or as a punishment (the Tswana) (Mbiti, 1970:141-142).

Floods and cloudbursts are associated with God. In some cases, it is believed that God's presence can be felt in springs, rivers, pools and lakes (the Lugbara, the Lango, the Turu, the Shona, the Azande, the Banyoro, the Ganda, the Haya, the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, and the Yoruba). Some rivers are thought to be divinities, as in the case of river Tano (the

Ashanti) and the Nile (the Shilluk), and waterfalls are considered manifestations of God (the Nandi, the Gisu) (Mbiti, 1970:145-148)

Many peoples have a concept of sacred stones or rocks. For these peoples, the stones or the rocks are associated with God either as his abode or as his manifestation. Others believe that the mountains and hills are the places where the immanence of God is most intense (the Agikuyu - mt. Kenya, the Lango - mt. Agoro, the Bavenda - Matoba hills, Jumjum - Jebel Tunya, the Shona - Matopo mountians) (Mbiti, 1970:148-151). Consequently, mountains, hills and other high standing earth formations in a way give a concrete manifestation of God's presence and his being (Mbiti, 1969:55).

There are divinities of metals among the Edo, the Yoruba, and the Itsekiri. Desolate places and wastelands also have some significance in the African peoples' description of God. The Shona made the Zimbabwe ruins a sacred place long before the Europeans 'discovered' the land of the Shona. The Turkana diviner-to-be retires into a desert area for an extended period of time before he begins to practise. The Lugbara do not go to desolate places for fear that God in his immanent aspects resides in such places (Mbiti, 1970:148-151).

8.3.3.2.3. Trees and Plants

The forests are generally associated with God. This explains why a number of peoples have sacred groves where religious ceremonies are performed (the Agikuyu, the Akamba, the Meru, the Butawa, the Igbo). Sometimes the forests are thought to be occupied by the spirits or the divinities. The Herero speak of 'the tree of life', while the Bambuti, the Chagga, and the Meru talk of 'the forbidden tree'. There is also the idea of sacred trees. The Akamba, the Egede, the Agikuyu, the Meru and the Tonga offer sacrifices and prayers under a fig tree. A number of peoples have a concept of sacred trees.[129] The sacred trees symbolise God's immanence. The Banyarwanda, for example, believe that

[129] The Barundi, the Batawa, the Beir, the Murle, the Gisu, the Igbo, the Galla, the Masongo, the Teita, the Toposa, the Sonjo, and the Ngombe all have a concept of sacred trees (Mbiti, 1970:109-113).

God lives in every big tree. The Idoma view the white silk-cotton tree or the fig tree as symbolising God. The Lango, the Lugbara and the Luo associate God with certain trees. In contexts where divinities are understood to be a reality, trees are viewed as their temporary abode (the Ashanti) (Mbiti, 1970:109-113).

8.3.3.2.4. Natural Phenomena

Having shown us the connection that traditional Africa makes between God and such phenomena as wind, thunder, lightning, flood and storm, Mbiti also lets us see how traditional Africa uses the metaphors of light, fire, smoke, day, night, heat, cold, colours and numbers to describe God. Traditional Africa associates God with light, brilliance and heat. This is the reason many African peoples have names which are similar for both God and the sun.[130] God is also associated with heat. The Ila believe that heat indicates that God is much too hot. Whereas he is associated with light and brilliance, he also assumes the rhythm of day and night. The immanence of God by day is indicated by light, while his immanence by night is associated with the moon, darkness, and coolness. When it is cool, then God has granted his peace and deliverance from evil (the Nuer, the Luvedu) (Mbiti, 1970:154) The Fon connects God's aspects of motherliness, gentleness, rest and joy with both the moon and the night (Mbiti, 1970:134). For some peoples, the night symbolises a time of communication and contact with God in a way that benefits the human community (the Nuba), but for some peoples the night symbolises shame, fear and punishment (the Meru) (Mbiti, 1970:154).

Some peoples believe that God is black (the Maasai). The Maasai believe that originally there were four gods, the black god (very good), the white god (good), the red god (bad) and the blue god (neither good nor bad), but now the only God that remains is the black God. The Dinka and the Vugusu associate suffering and misfortune with a black divinity. The Agikuyu and the Yoruba associate God with absolute whiteness. Whiteness is the phenomenon by which the Vugusu distinguish between God and other divinities (Mbiti,

[130] The peoples who have names similar for both God and the sun are the Afasure, the Ankore, the Ashanti, the Chagga, the Chawai, the Dorobo, the Elgeyo, the Ingassana, the Luo, the Nandi, the Sonjo, the Akan, the Pyem (Mbiti, 1970:133).

1970:155). Numbers do not constitute a significant way of describing God. The only occurences that Mbiti discusses are those that indicate their significance in the reverence of God, punishment, creation stories, and bad omens (Mbiti, 1970:156,157).

8.4. GM Setiloane: The African Concept of God as *Mysterium Tremendum et fascinans*

8.4.1. Setiloane's point of departure

The point of departure of Prof G Setiloane's understanding of God is in line with what Rudolf Otto has in his book, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923), called *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Otto, 1923:19ff; cf Setiloane, 1973:6 and 1976:77). According to Setiloane, the African peoples cannot agree with a kind of theology that explains the essence of the divine completely and exhaustively in the kind of rational attributions we see in Western theologies. What the African peoples believe in, explains Setiloane, is a divine -- Modimo in Sotho-Tswana—who on the one hand is *mysterium tremendum* and on the other hand is *fascinans* (see Setiloane, 1976:77; cf Otto, 1923:26-55).

For Setiloane, numinousness is a basic theological truth that must never be forgotten in formulating the doctrine of God (Setiloane, 1976:78). Theology needs to understand God not just rationally but it also needs the *mysterium tremendum* and the *fascinans.* These two concepts (the *mysterium tremendum* and the *fascinans*) applied to God, explains Otto, convey the idea of

> ... the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness, to which the entire religious development bears witness, at any rate from the level of 'demonic dread' onward, is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The demonic-divine object may appear to the mind as an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it his own. The 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something which captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy

intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen (Otto, 1923:45).

Since God is *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*, Setiloane wants to see such elements as "awefulness", "overpoweringness", "energy or urgency of the numinous" perceptible particularly in the 'wrath', "the wholly other", and fascination (see Otto, 1923:19-55) associated with the understanding of God. These elements, Setiloane believes, are clearly noticeable in the Sotho-Tswana concept of God.

The Sotho-Tswana word, which Setiloane finds useful in conveying the concept of *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*, is *selo* (Setiloane, 1973:6,7). In Sotho-Tswana, *selo* is described as *selo se se boitshengang, sa poitshego, se se tshabegang, se se mashwe* ("a fearful, awful, ugly, ugly, monstrous thing"). Setiloane emphasises that there is nothing malevolent or malicious in these adjectives (see Setiloane, 1976:78,79).[131] When *selo* is applied to MODIMO, it conveys what Otto calls *Ungeheuere, poitshego* which is translated as the "monstrous" or "weird" (Setiloane, 1976:78, 79; cf 1986:33). MODIMO therefore is "described as *selo*, 'thing', 'monster'" (Setiloane, 1973:6,7; cf 1986:22,23). Since MODIMO is *selo,* Setiloane proposes that God be designated with the pronoun IT rather than He (ibid). The real reason why Setiloane proposes IT is because whenever the Sotho-Twsana talks of MODIMO, they do not have a person in mind (Setiloane, 1986:25,27). The concept *selo* is apparently too intense for human beings, although it is used of chiefs. MODIMO understood as *selo* explains why IT had to be approached through badimo[132] and neither could its name be used so freely (ibid:16). Setiloane explains that the Sotho-Tswana felt that the missionaries did not recognise the greatness of MODIMO enough because they used his name so freely.[133]

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[131] The Sotho-Tswana word *selo* is not "a mere neuter, but, in the right context, an attribution of excellence appearing in the praises of chiefs" (Setiloane, 1973:15). The word *selo* literally means 'beast', however, when applied to a chief it conveys the notion of "strength and power and almost horror which properly attach to a chief. .. even when he is most just and most considerate of his people's need and opinion" (Setiloane,1973:15). Because of this factor, Setiloane prefers to spell the Sotho-Tswana name for God in capital letters.

[132] Willoughby, WC book; *The Soul of the Bantu* (1928) explains that Modimo has to be approached through the *badimo (*the ancestors) because he is "too great to be approached by the mortals" (Willoughby, 1928:206ff). Setiloane notes, however, that "despite the dangers of direct approach, IT can be called upon

With these considerations, Setiloane has wondered whether

> What the missionaries have offered to Africans is not GOD but the god of the Europeans, who may well—perhaps rightly-- be discarded with the coming of political independence and the reassertion of African culture which is its ideological counterpart. Indeed, the whole discussion in the West—focused in 'Honest to God' and the "Death of God" theology – suggests that the West itself has lost the image of God as "mysterium tremendum et fascinans", and deals, at the best, with a "creator absconditus", a god of the gaps, or a saviour of individual souls destined for a pie in the sky (Setiloane, 1976:229).

Regardless of this concern, Setiloane continues to hold the conviction that "the Black man still believes that Christianiy comes from God (Modimo), so he clings to it although his mind is in a state of revolt against Western Christianity" (Setiloane, 1986:29). According to Setiloane, the Africans never disagreed with the missionaries in their description of God, because when the missionaries talked about God, it was as if they were telling the Africans "an old story with which they were quite familiar but have now half forgotten" (EW Smith quoted in Setiloane, 1986:28). The familiarity was most evident in the attributes (Setiloane, 1986:26; cf Smith, 1950:33). To the Africans, the attributes of God as he had revealed himself to them and the attributes of the God the missionaries preached were so similar that the Africans agreed to a simple identification of the God they had known with the God of the missionary message (Setiloane, 1986:26).

8.4.2. Qualities and Names of Modimo

8.4.2.1.Modimo is one.

The Sotho-Tswana knows Modimo only in the singular.[133] In the words of Setiloane, that Modimo is one is a "statement so obvious as to seem absurd. MODIMO ... has no plural without a radical change of meaning. There is no being whom they could begin to compare with IT. Nor would it occur to them that IT was any other than THAT called, in

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in mortal danger" (Setiloane, 1976:84).

[133] The Sotho-Tswana still regard the use of the name MODIMO as taboo. For example, when MODIMO forms part of a personal name as it stands, the part having the word is avoided in everyday use of the name, "eg a child whose name is 'Tiro-ya-Modimo', the work of MODIMO, would ordinarily be called simply 'Tiro'" (Setiloane, 1976:235).

neighbouring societies, by other names" (Setiloane, 1973:9,10; cf 1976:80). Setiloane, doing an etymology of the word MODIMO, comes to the conclusion that

> The missionaries were looking in a wrong place for the etymology of 'Modimo'. The word initially had nothing to do with *godimo*. .. or *legodimo*. The prefix *Mo* of the word is a prefix of the Third Class of the table of nouns in African languages, called the '*Mo-Me* Class'. There is a whole number of nouns in this class, which do not take the plural form. Such nouns are names of 'invisible, intangible objects often describing natural phenomena...' for example *Mollo*: fire, *Mosi*:smoke, *Mmuwane*: mist, *Monyo*: dew, *Ngwedi*: moon, *Mokoodi*: rainbow, etc. This regulation applies to equivalents of these words in all African languages. The root or stem of the word – *dimo* is a derivation of a local permutation of the original African stem – *dzimu*. All African philologists, agree that the correct translation of – *dzimu* is 'spirit or pertaining to spirit'. African colleagues from Central and Equatorial Africa, Zaire, Congo (Brazza), Cameroon and Fenade Po where the word *'mudzimu'* exists in its original form do confirm that even in present day usage it is ascribed to things of the Spirit' (Setiloane, 1986:24)

There are badimo, but these are ancestors, the living dead, and are not to be confused with the Divinity (Setiloane, 1986:17). Badimo therefore belong to the category of persons and they are experienced as such, although they share in the "essence of Modimo, BoModimo". Since they share in BoModimo, and humans also do, the levels of intensity of the numinous in them is much higher than that found in man (Setiloane, 1986:19).

8.4.2.2.Modimo is Supreme Being

The Sotho-Tswana expresses the supremacy of MODIMO using a number of titles and praise names. Notable titles and names used in this regard include:"*hla'a-Macholo"* (ancient of days); "MODIMO *wa borare"* (of my forefathers— thus the forefathers know MODIMO better): "*Na Choeng Tsa Dithaba*" (whose abode is on the highest peak of the mountains); "*Mong'a Tschle*" (owner or master of all, Lord) (Setiloane, 1973:10; cf 1976:80). By Supreme, the Sotho-Tswana do not mean 'supreme being among other beings'. In contrast, they believe that MODIMO "is Being, from whom all particular beings derive. Through badimo, IT is concerned in all life" (Setiloane, 1976:227). The focus of these peoples therefore is not on 'Supreme'; the emphasis falls on 'Being'.

8.4.2.3.Modimo is not a man

When talking about MODIMO, the Sotho-Tswana do not have a person in mind. Setiloane notes that the "one quality of MODIMO which nearly approaches a human quality (but far surpasses all human manifestation, thereby rendering MODIMO numinous) is being associated with 'penetrating insight into men and things' as if it had some human cognition" (Setiloane, 1986:25). On account of this 'cognition' the African peoples know that MODIMO has personality, although as Smith says, he is "in sharp distinction from everyone and everything else. ... He is a being who is not human, and never in the recollection of men was human" (Smith, 1950:21, 22). Rather MODIMO is *moya* (spirit). But although MODIMO is *moya*, this *moya* is to be understood in the sense of power and energy ever going on. Consequently, MODIMO can be explained by Placide Tempels' concept of *Force Vitale,* but understood in the sense in which Vincent Mulago has explained *Participation Vitale,* which expresses the energy that is ever active, initiating action, and maintaining interaction (Setiloane, 1986:28).

8.4.2.4.Modimo is invisible, is everywhere and is involved with everything

No man has seen MODIMO. In a sense he is unkown, he is not even tangible as wind yet he is experienced at all points. Quoting Otto, Setiloane explains that the Sotho-Tswana experience MODIMO in ways other than "the world of senses" (Setiloane, 1973:13; cf 1976:80). But although MODIMO is wholly other and therefore experienced in ways other than senses, MODIMO is still known to be manifested in lightning and thunder; however, these are but manifestations of MODIMO. The manifestations are not to be confused with IT (Setiloane, 1973:10; cf 1976:82-83). Since MODIMO is *motlhodi*, he is involved in everything and so IT controls everything "even in the last resort natural disasters of *baloi* (socerers); and IT is affected by offences against the natural order" (Setiloane, 1973:13; cf 1976:82,83), thus the need to restore the order once it has been disturbed.

8.4.2.5.Modimo is the Source

The term used here to convey the concept of source is *motlhodi* (Setiloane, 1973:13; cf 1976:80). This word refers to "the source, originating in unrecorded time, of the stream of life which flows into the indeterminate future and is ever returning to its source" (Setiloane, 1976:81). MODIMO is the "Creator, Originator, and cause of all things" (Setiloane, 1976:note 27). To the Sotho-Tswana, it is obvious that "man is only because MODIMO is" and men are in a relationship because the "eternal I creates in a relationship a plurality of thous" (Setiloane, 1976:226). Man is himself numinous, but the numinousness is derived from MODIMO (ibid:227). A saying which truly expresses the numinousness of personhood, is 'Motho ke Modimo'. By this expression, the Sotho-Tswana mean "the mystery that the human is a portion, a tributary of the Supreme Vital Force (MODIMO) itself (Setiloane, 1986:42). Elsewhere Setiloane explains that

> The human person is that Energy or Force, that is Modimo—Divinity. The word used to describe the human person in this saying is the same as that employed to describe the mysterious, all pervasive Energy-Force which is in fact the *source of life.* It expresses in a very pithy and exact manner that a person is something divine, sacred, weird, holy; all qualities of Divinity (Modimo) (ibid:13).

8.4.2.6.Modimo is in the sky but vividly associated with the earth

MODIMO dwells in the sky (Setiloane, 1973:11-12; cf 1976:81), yet he is also said to be living in a hole in the bowels of the earth (Setiloane, 1973:12:cf 1976:82).

8.4.2.7.Modimo wills good to mankind, preserves justice

No one can change the purposes of MODIMO. The *badimo* are asked to appeal to IT in times of need and calamity. No evil comes from MODIMO, however, occasionally he may inflict pain to "draw attention to a disruption of harmony by man". Rain and harvest are his gifts (Setiloane, 1973:13,14). Modimo does not just will good, he does this because in the first place his very being embodies "life together and relationships between persons and peoples" (Setiloane, 1986:11). In order for the community to be together, MODIMO binds it with justice. MODIMO's justice is *wa makgon the'a kgodi's kgokgo* (steadfast and fixed like granite) (Setiloane, 1973:14; cf 1976:83).

8.4.2.8.Modimo acts through badimo yet he is readily available to those in need

The normal way in which MODIMO acts is through the *badimo*. The badimo are the intermediators. However, it is understood that MODIMO can "intervene directly to draw attention to the breach of taboos" (Setiloane, 1973:14; 1976:83). The intervention may take the form of such calamities as drought, hail, locusts and plague that IT alone can avert (Setiloane, 1973:14). Yet the emphasis does not fall on the individual.

> Man did not originate as an individual. He came out of a cave "in company with other people and living things". It is the community which demands his first loyalty. All—the noble, the rich, the poor, adults, and children—must bow before its general good. Conflicts and dissentions of course there are in plenty:and this because every I is fully I and every thou fully thou. But those who wilfully reject the common good are 'baloi', the embodiments of evil ... (Setiloane, 1976:226; see also Setiloane, 1986:9-16).

8.5. Conclusion

The concept of God is perhaps the single area of doctrine that has received immense focus in African inculturation theology. Two reasons could be advanced for this focus: first, the African theologians seem to view theology as primarily about engaging in discourses on God. Kaufman once said that the "... proper business of theology is the analysis, criticism, and reconstruction of the image/concept of God" (Kaufman, 1982:74; cf Idowu, 1970:94). But the second, and perhaps the most important reason, is the place God occupies in the African cosmology. We noted in the previous chapter that African cosmology is a hierarchy of beings, with the Divine being at the number one place. The Divine being, in the thought of Africans, is number one in view of him being the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of man and the rest of the created order. In that sense he is therefore the ultimate source and controller of 'being' which, as we clearly saw in Tempels and Kagame, is expressed by the African in terms of 'force', 'power' or 'energy' (see also Mbiti, 1969:16).

The following can be considered a summary of the African inculturation theology's understanding of God:

1) God is one. There is no other God besides him. Various African peoples knew this God by different names. This one God, known to different African peoples by different names such as Nyasaye, Leza, Mulungu, Modimo, and so on, is also the One True God of the Christian worship. He is the Creator, the Fashioner, and the Source. He is all these and more because he is the ultimate Being. However, he did not create and leave. As is clearly indicated in the African cosmology, he is involved with the spirit world, the dead of the peoples, the living, the world of animals and plants, as well as with the entire created universe. God is a spiritual Being, he is *moya*, no one has seen him. He has personality (MUNTU) but he is not human. The African people have always known him as UMUNTU, the Great Muntu, but never as a human being. In the words of Setiloane, God "was always the numinous, *Ungeheure, mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of Rudolf Otto" (Setiloane, 1978:411). He has a personal name, life and consciousness. In view of this, he is said to have personality and is described anthropomorphically. He is worshipped. Sacrifices and prayers are offered to him. It must be noted that in contexts in which the intermediaries are prevalent, there is practically no direct worship of God. Generally, as Kirwen has noted, in such contexts the ancestors, the spirits and the divinities are the saviours of humanity (Kirwen, 1987:5-8). On the basis of these evidences, Smith once stated that

> ... it is a noteworthy fact, vouchsafed for by many missionaries, that when one goes to pagan Bantu one does not have to prove the existence of God. They easily accept the idea of the God of Christianity. As M Junod says: '... it seems as if one were telling them an old story with which they had been quite familiar but have now half forgotten' (Smith, 1926:38).

It seems therefore that for thousands of years the African people have known God as creator and sustainer of all things. For this reason the preaching of the Gospel and the translation of Scriptures use African names of God in each area of the continent.

2) As an African Christian thinker, what do I make of the natural knowledge of God which the African inculturation theology puts so much emphasis on? This is a hard question. However, I am willing to commit myself to the following judgements:

- It is futile to deny the African people a natural knowledge of God. A self-declaration of God to mankind can be recognised in the natural order. However,

God himself is not to be encountered in nature and history. God exists above the order of nature and is thus not immanent within it. The order of nature only shows traces of his reality.

- The self-declaration of God in the order of nature is objectively real. What is revealed, however little, is God himself. Nevertheless the knowledge of God acquired from the natural order is subjective and questionable. What we know of God from the natural order must be subjective and unreal because, in the first place, our sinful condition does not allow us to have a neutral attitude towards God. Secondly, our finitude as creatures means that we cannot grasp the full sweep of God's self-revelation. Moreover, the fact of the hiddenness of God means that for the moment, we will not have a full knowledge of him. Full knowledge of God is reserved for the eschaton.
- The fact that the African people knew God from the natural order means that they cannot shelter behind the excuse that they have no knowledge of him. The African peoples have perceived the self-revelation of God. As Calvin once said, this natural knowledge must be distinguished from the saving knowledge. The natural knowledge "exists solely for the purpose of making us inexcusable" (Calvin, CW, 49, 24; 49, 326; 48, 327). As is the case among other peoples also, the African peoples have turned what they have perceived of the self-revelation of God away from God and towards creatures, spirits, and divinities.
- Since it is impossible for men everywhere to ever come to a true knowledge of God by themselves, the final outcome of the natural knowledge of God should lead us to the praise of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ our saviour. For the African people to view God as saviour of mankind is to present them with an overwhelming truth. This is because the saviour such as we see in Christ is nowhere in the African cultural milieu. According to JS Mbiti

> ... Our myths look back to the creation of the world, the early man, the coming of death into the world, the separation between God and men, heaven and earth. There is nothing that looks towards the future, nothing to be awaited and nothing to be expected in the future apart from the rhythm of day and night, birth, initiation, marriage, death, and entry into the company of the departed (Mbiti, 1972:60).

Of course, as Calvin argues,

> … the preaching of the cross is not compatible with human reason, yet we must accept the same in all humility if we desire once more to enter into relationship with God our Creator (from whom we are estranged) in such a way that He again becomes our Father (Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 6, 1; cf II, 6, 4).

This is the message for the African people as it is for the other peoples of the world as well. Nowhere is this captured more truthfully than in the doctrine of the Trinity.

9. Moving Beyond the African Notion of God: Clearing Ground for the Doctrine of the Trinity

9.1. Introduction

The question this chapter seeks to address is of utmost importance to this research. African theology is Christian theology. As such, it has the moral obligation to articulate the Christian theology for the African Christian population. The chief agents in this task are of course the African Christians themselves. They are the ones who already operate within the cultural language into which Christianity is to be translated; they are the ones who raise the questions, provide the experience of having lived with the questions and struggled with different answers. Indeed, it is the humble African Christians who at the end of the day recognise the solutions which are "genuine, authentic, and commensurate with their experience" (Schreiter, 1985:17). However, as Schreiter has explained, the professional theologian also has a role:

> ... the professional theologian serves as an important resource, helping the community to clarify its own experience and to relate it to the experience of other communities past and present. Thus the professional theologian has an indispensable but limited role. The theologian cannot create a theology in isolation from the community's experience; but the community has need of the theologian's knowledge to ground its own experience within the Christian traditions of faith. In so doing, the theologian helps to create the bonds of mutual accountability between local and world church (Schreiter, 1985:18).

The basic question here is whether the professional African theologians have helped the African Christian population to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. The answer to this question is a simple 'no'. The doctrine of God in African theology (1) uses the comparative interpretation of the Scripture, which simply highlights the similarities between the African concepts of God and the Christian view of God, (2) is built upon a cultural identity paradigm, which in principle is responsible in this context for emphasis on the African concepts of God rather than on the Christian view of God, and (3) has had no conceptual framework to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity to the African audience. In this chapter we seek to understand how these factors have hindered the formulation of

the doctrine of the Trinity for the African context and we also make suggestions that could help move us in the direction of formulating a doctrine of the Trinity appropriate for the African context.

9.2. The Comparative Interpretation of the Scripture

In his monograph, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (1986), Prof. Mbiti identifies at least three ways African Christianity interacts with the Scripture. He names these ways as the "written theology", "oral theology" and "symbolic theology" (Mbiti, 1986: 46,47)[134]. Professor Kwame Bediako from Ghana has also drawn our attention to what he calls "the living roots of the church" or "oral theology" and "academic theology" (Bediako, 1995:59,60). The "roots" of the church are the ways in which the church interacts with the Scripture. Knut Holter's paper read at the international workshop of Old and New Testament Studies in Africa held at the University of Stellenbosh, South Africa (May 14 - 15, 1999) also talks of two contexts within which the African theology interacts with the Bible. He identifies the contexts as "the popular context" and "the academic context"(Holter, 1999).

However, whether in the popular context or in the academic context, scholars seem to agree that the African biblical interpretation is characterized by two significant considerations. These considerations are "the use of comparative methods that focuses on correspondence between the Bible, especially Old Testament, and the religio-cultural and socio-political realities of Africa" on the one hand and the search for and "emphasis on relevance" on the other hand (Zinkuratire, 1999:1; cf Tutu, 1972). African theology is not the first to introduce the "comparative method" or the direct literal reading and the search

[134] Professor JS Mbiti defines these three areas of African theology as follows: " . . . written theology is the privilege of a few Christians who have had considerable education and who generally articulate their theological reflections in articles and books, mostly in English, French, German and other European languages. Second, oral theology is produced in the field by the masses, in African languages, through song, sermon, teaching, prayer, conversation, and the like. It is theology in the open air, often unrecorded, often heard only by small groups and audiences, and is generally lost as far as libraries and seminaries are concerned. Third, symbolic theology is exposed through art, sculpture, drama, symbols, rituals, dance, colours, numbers and so on." (Mbiti, 1986:46,47).

for "relevance" into the task of biblical interpretation. Edwin W Smith has noted that this was also the conventional mode of translation employed by the first translators of the Bible into the African vernaculars (Smith, 1950:35; cf. Nthamburi and Waruta, 1997:47). A word like *Nyasaye* (God in the Luo of Kenya) is used in the Luo translation of the Bible in a manner that allows a Luo reader to assume that *Nyasaye* has the same meaning in the Bible as it has in the traditional context. This theological phenomenon is not restricted to the African languages as if they are the only vernaculars. Professor Bediako has noted that the flowering of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century had something to do with "the European rediscovery and repossession of the Gospel through the medium of European vernacular languages" (Bediako, 1995:60).

Zinkuratire has rightly observed that the comparative method of biblical interpretation allows the African theological enterprise to see the relationship between the biblical revelation and the African traditional worldviews in at least three ways: comparative or corroborative, corrective, and suppletive (Zinkuratire, 1999:1).[135] The sole use of the comparative approach has three basic problems. In the first place, it does not highlight the areas of divergence between the biblical testimony and the concept as it is presented by the culture of reception. Of course the Christian's view of God and the African concepts of God show many similarities. However, there are fundamental differences that must not be lost to sight. The African concepts of God, for example, have no notion of God revealing himself in the Son. Neither do they know that God's Spirit is a distinct hypostasis but of an equal divinity with God.

Secondly, the exclusive use of the comparative reading of the Scripture effectively short-circuits much of the theological developments and controversies that the doctrine of God has gone through in the past 2000 years. The theological developments, such as the ones

[135] A comparative or corroborative plan of interpreting the Bible basically compares the biblical understanding of God with the concepts of God already available in the intellectual culture of the traditional Africa. The suppletive approach finds what is present but weak in the African culture and supplements it with the biblical information. The corrective approach looks for the areas in the African thought that are not consistent with the biblical information and replaces such areas accordingly.

that took place from the second to the fourth centuries, and the struggles of the reformation era are easily ruled out as irrelevant. Sometimes it is argued that the theological issues the church debated over the centuries are way too abstract for the African mind. A notion such as this is unfortunate. The problem in traditional Africa is not lack of logic, reason or scientific curiosity. African peoples use these mental capacities all the time. The fact that the African peoples have gone the communal consensus way does not mean that her individual persons cannot do critical reflection (see Oruka, 1991: 49, 50). The problem is that there is an unwillingness to allow the African church to participate in the story of the Church. The African church is part of the universal Church. We in Africa must exploit the Scriptural witness as well as the resources of all Christian ages and places. Our voice should rise with those of the other Christians elsewhere in affirming the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.

The third problem with the exclusive use of the comparative reading of the Scripture is that it does not allow the culture of reception to benefit from the suppletive and the corrective use of the Scripture. Whenever the Scripture raises an issue, the theologian is more than ready to look for a corresponding concept in the culture of reception. This plan has worked well in some cases, but in other instances it has resulted in theological disasters. Take Christologies and Pneumatologies in the African theological discussions for example. Within the African theological situation, there is an emergence of Christologies based on titles that are specifically African in origin or emphasis. Some of the titles used are Friend, Liberator, elder Brother, Ancestor, King/Chief, Elder, Healer, and Master of Initiation. A similar scenario is noted in the African theology's formulations of Pneumatologies. Notable Pneumatologies in the African context are done with the concepts of the vital force, the spirits, and the ancestors in view (see Oosthuizen, 1968: 129, 133f.; cf. Sundkler, 1961: 200)[136]. The fundamental problem with these

[136] Some of the literature on Christology in the African scene include: Thomas, G, *An African Tree of Life*, Maryknoll, New York, 1990; Ekem, JDK, *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Akan Traditional Priesthood in Dialogue Relation to the Priest-Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hamburg, 1994; Manus, UC, *Christ, the African King: New Testament Christology*, Bern, New York, 1993; Mofokeng, TA, *Crucified Among the Cross Bearers*, Kampen Holland 1983; Pobee, JS, ed. *Exploring Afro-Christology*, Bern, New York, 1992; Schreiter, RJ, ed, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll, New York, 1991; Udoh, EB, *Guest Christology: An Interpretive View of the Christological Problem in Africa*, New York, 1988; Vicedom, GF, ed, *Christ and the Younger Churches*, London, 1972; and Wachege, PN, *Jesus Christ our Muthamaki (Ideal*

Christologies and Pneumatologies is that Christ and the Holy Spirit are not discussed in the context of the principle of *homoousios* and therefore their Divinity is not given proper place.

9.3. The Problems raised by the paradigm of Reflection

9.3.1. The nature of the paradigm

There are two distinct issues here. The first is the problem of cultural identity. Since the theologians began their reflection within the paradigm of cultural identity, they have found it rather difficult to steer the discussions back to the basic Christian precepts. The second problem is focus on the African concepts of God. It is clear that the issue of cultural identity and focus on the African concepts of God together place the African theology within a paradigm that makes it structurally difficult to raise and address the idea of the Trinity with passion.

9.3.2. The Cultural Identity Issue

Historically, African inculturation theology began its reflection from the question of identity. And so the African concepts of God available in the works of B Idowu, John S Mbiti and G Setiloane and other African theologians are partly motivated by the need to draw attention to the religious schizophrenia that until recently characterized the African Chrisitanity "and to attempt to remedy it, mainly by rehabilitating Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness" (Tutu, 1978:367). Kwame Bediako's book, *Theology and Identity* (1992), is a recent example of the seriousness of the issue of identity in the African theological enterprise.

It is common knowledge, as Adrian Hastings has written, that "... Europeans almost always underestimated the African sense of God in the earlier encounters, being much

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Elder), Nairobi, Kenya, 1992.

more struck by the strong consciousness of a wider spirit world - ancestors and natural forces - with its shrines and sacrifices" (Hastings, 1976: 51). One does not need to look far to corroborate this statement. In 1668, Olfert Dapper wrote: "No one ... however thoroughly he has enquired, has ever been able to find among the Kaffirs, Hottentots and Beachrangers, any trace of religion or any show of honour to God or the devil" (Schapera & Farrington, 1933:75). In the nineteenth century, Robert Moffat echoed Dapper when he wrote that Satan

> ... has employed his agency with fatal success, in erasing every vestige of religious impression from the minds of the Bechwanas, Hottentots and Bushmen; leaving them without a single ray to guide them from the dark and dread futurity, or a single link to unite them with the skies (Moffat, 1842:243).

Accusations such as these are grave. They need an authority in the field in question to suggest an alternative opinion, if any. Edwin W Smith comes to the rescue of the Hottentots, the Kaffirs [Bantus], the Beachrangers [Khoi] and the Bechwanas when in 1950 he wrote "with our large interpretation of religion nobody with any knowledge of these people would venture to say such things about them" (Smith, 1950:83).

Given the place of Africa on the globe, the quest for identity is certainly a legitimate concern. In his book, *Theology and Identity* (1992), Kwame Bediako has demonstrated that cultural identity has always been crucial in the contextualisation of the Christian message. What we must emphasise, however, is that it is possible to affirm our cultural identity without demeaning our Christian identity. In other words, it is possible to affirm our cultural identity and our Christian identity simultaneously. Great theologians like Athanasius, the Capaddocians, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and closer to our time, Barth, clearly had a firm grasp of their own cultures, nevertheless their Christian identity forced them to formulate their thoughts in ways that were critical to their own cultures. It is possible for us to refuse to be either subservient or aggressive but to offer the right interpretation of our cultural heritage to the global theological community without hindering our Christian consciousness.

9.3.3. Focus on the African Notion of God: Some key Reasons

9.3.3.1.Failure of Trust

The African theologians studied in the previous chapter clearly set their theological agenda to correct, among other things, the European missionary view that misrepresented, undervalued and ignored the sense of God and his activity as perceived in African tradition. We noted the concept of *selo* proposed by GM Setiloane and taken from the Sotho-Tswana and the idea of diffused monotheism suggested by both Bolaji Idowu and JS Mbiti. The point of these proposals is to state in clear terms that the African peoples thought about God in ways that were no less complex. In fact, according to Idowu, it is the European conceptions of God that may not be trusted. He observed the following in a paper presented at the Consultation of African Theologians in 1966:

> Recent publications in Europe and America have come to indicate how much confusion there is in the minds even of the enlightened Westerners about God. If we take for example some of the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the writings of Paul Tillich, and *Honest to God* of Dr JAT Robinson, we shall see at least two facts clearly emerging: the fact that the masses of Westerners appear to be losing their sense of God, and Western theology is in conflict because it has become too theoretical: God according to it has become largely an intellectual concept (Idowu, 1969:21).

Gabriel M Setiloane, an ally and a great admirer of Idowu, in his *Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* (1976), holds a similar understanding of the European views of God:

> In the whole discussion of MODIMO [Sotho-Tswana proper name of God], and in what has been said above about the contrast between 'Being' and 'Supreme Being' [see his chapter 6] there is a suggestion that what missionaries have been able to offer to Africans is not GOD but the god of the Europeans, who may well - perhaps rightly - be discarded with the coming of political independence and the reassertion of African culture which is its idealogical counterpart. Indeed the whole discussion in the West - focused in *Honest to God* and the 'Death of God' theology- suggest that the West itself has lost the image of God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and deals at best, with a *creator absconditus,* a god of the gaps, or a saviour of individual souls destined for pie in the sky . . . It is indeed suggested that western theologians might go to school with Sotho-Tswana if the wish to rediscover, in truth, the Yahweh whom they profess to serve (Setiloane, 1976:229,230).

9.3.3.2.The Problem of Appearance

The problem of 'appearance and reality' deals with the fact that the African peoples appeared to the outsiders as if they did not have God (Idowu, 1962:2). The problem of 'appearance and reality' can be traced back to the days of the explorer Stanley. Since then, Africa has been described as 'dark', 'darkest', 'a place governed by insensible fetish' and her people as niggers, 'burnt out husks of men with no souls' (Idowu, 1969:10). A famous acting governor of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Emil Ludwig, once said: "How can the untutored African conceive God? ... How can this be? ... Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing." (Ludwig quoted in Smith, 1950:1).

In agreement with Edwin W Smith and in contradiction with the opinion of Emil Ludwig, the position of the African theology is that the African might have appeared less sophisticated and unschooled according to some standards; however, the reality is that they are not only capable of thinking about God, but moreover they are capable of thinking about God in abstract and philosophical terms. Setiloane demonstrates that the Sotho-Tswana's view of God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is not only philosophical, but in a number of ways it bears a mark of truth that is missing in contemporary Western notions of God (Setiloane, 1976:229). In the thought of Idowu, the miracle of grace has been taking place all over Africa. God's self-disclosure did not exclude the Africans. God's self-disclosure, which was to all the races of the world, was also grasped by each of the African peoples according to their native capacities. Mbiti's book, the *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970), attests to the above statement of Idowu. Mbiti's research, done among more that two hundred and seventy peoples of Africa (Mbiti, 1970: xiii), indicates in clear terms that each of the peoples of this continent grasped something of God according to their native capacities.[137]

If God revealed himself to the African peoples also, then a biblical idea of God does not have to be introduced to the African peoples in a way that is completely unrelated to what the African peoples already know (see Bediako, 1992).[138] This position is not entirely new within the African theological scene. On the contrary, it is an echo of the first African bishop, Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who in his instruction to his clergy said:

> When we first introduce the Gospel to any people we should take advantage of any priniciples which they themselves admit. Thus though the heathens in this part of Africa possess no written legends, yet wherever we turn our eyes, we find among them, in their animal sacrifices, a text which is the mainspring of the Christian faith: 'Without shedding of blood there is no remission'. Therefore we may with propriety say: 'That which ye ignorantly practise, declare we unto you.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin' (Crowther quoted in Page, 1910:282)

9.3.3.3.The Idea of "Loan Gods"

In this book *The Making of Religion*, 1909, Andrew Lang criticises the idea of "loan-gods" from "missionaries and other Europeans" which earlier writers had advanced as the explanation of the concepts of God among what was then known as primitive cultures (Lang, 1909:xix). By the 1950s the idea of 'loan-gods' had not died, out as is evident in Edwin Smith's *African Ideas of God*, 1950. In the words of Smith, "certain writers seem to be supremely ambitious to find origins outside Africa for African ideas ... and they make great play with verbal similarities" (Smith, 1950:3). By the time Idowu is writing his "Introduction", 1962, the problem of 'loan-gods' is still real, except that this time the Africans are supposed to have received the concepts of God from the ancient civilization

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[137] Geoffrey Parrinder has noted that serious writers no longer describe the African religions as 'fetishism' and 'animism'. There is much more to the African religions than magical and idolatrous practices. Moreover, the African view of the divine is much more sophisticated than the mere personification of nature which the concept 'animism' suggests (Parrinder, 1969:25, 26; cf. Mbiti, 1969: 6-10). Richard J Gehman sees these terms as based on racism. In Gehman's own words, many of the "... theories are not only out-dated today but are offensive. They are racist and reflect a condescending attitude toward many peoples in the two-thirds world (Gehman, 1989: 38).

[138] Note that the issue here is God's self-revelation. The basic question of course is: Did God reveal himself to the African peoples, and did the African peoples perceive that revelation? The fact is that God is proclaimed to all men everywhere in nature (Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20; Acts 14:15-17) and through man's conscience (Rom. 2:14, 15; Acts 17:21; cf. Ecces. 3:11). This basic question must not be confused with what theology discusses as the limitations of the general revelation (see Gehman, 1989:41, 42; cf. Adeyemo, 1979: 24, 26).

of Egypt (Idowu, "Introduction", 1962:3). Idowu rejects the idea that the Africans have always been *tabula rasa* and that they could not have had their own concepts of God. Echoing Smith, Idowu describes the problem in the following words:

> There have been those who eagerly traced the origin of every element in our native belief and culture to sources outside ourselves. The ancient civilization of Egypt has been irresistible to such investigators, so attractive that it has become impossible for them to think even of breath of our nostrils without going all the way to Egypt for its source! (Idowu, "Introduction", 1962:3)[139].

At the very beginning of his book, *Concepts of God in Africa*, Mbiti takes the view that the African concepts of God he wishes to study "have sprung independently out of African reflection on God" (Mbiti, 1970:xiii). In the works of Professor Setiloane, we recognise that Modimo, as God known among the Sotho-Tswana, is clearly no loan God. The Sotho-Tswana did not get the idea of Modimo from the missionary. What they discovered from the missionaries was that Modimo and the God proclaimed by the missionary had similarities that these African peoples could not ignore (Setiloane, 1986:25,26). This statement can also be made of other African peoples and their respective concepts of God. If the African concepts of God are loaned from foreign sources, then we can equally say that the African cosmology is equally foreign. Although it is possible to make this kind of statement, we do not have the necessary data to buttress it.

9.3.3.4.The 'African Gods' and the God of the Christian Faith

For some reason theology in the African scene has discussed the doctrine of God in terms of the 'African Gods' and the God of the Christian worship.[140] Was the God known in

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[139] In his book, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, 1934, EA Wallis Budge argues that the Egyptian concept of God moved from in evolutionary phases from animism, through fetishism, the god and the goddesses and finally to the Sun god. According to the religion of Egypt, magic regulated the relations of the men, the dead, the spirits, and the gods (Budge, 1934: 3-136). It is interesting that the scholars who take an evolutionary view of the African traditional religions present these religions in a way that is clearly reminiscent of the Egyptian traditional religion (see Philip M Steyne, *Gods of Power: a study of beliefs and practices of animists*, 1989). Although Steyne's study if wider than the African traditional religions, he clearly sees the Africans as modern day animists and their religion animism.

[140] Note however that the focus here is not the divinities or the mediators. The focus is on whether the African religions should be given status of world religion. The proponents of world status for African religions argue that the different African peoples had religions that were as good as Islam, Christianity and

traditional Africa (*Nyasaye, Were, Mulungu, Mungu, Asis, Olodumare, Modimo, Ngai,* and so on) the one true God whom we Christians worship? For African theology, the answer to this question is yes.[141] As Professor Mbiti has noted

> ... the concept of God is common in both Christianity and African Religion. The Biblical God is not unknown to the African peoples. For thousands of years they have known him as creator and sustainer of all things. For this reason the preaching of the Gospel and the translation of Scriptures use African names of God in each area of the continent. The concept of God is a point of continuity (Mbiti, 1978: 309).

The African theologians are not the first to come up with this understanding. Smith has explained this trend in the following words:

> Christian missionaries in their teachings and translations of Scripture have adopted African names of God. This practice has been criticized on the ground that pagan terms can never express Christian truth. There is a pragmatic sanction for what they do. The Hebrew elohim was a class name covering many supernatural beings. ... When the Hebrew Scripture was translated into Greek, elohim was rendered theos and the sacred personal name Yahwe kurios, ' Lord'. Greek-speaking Christians as well as Jews of the Diaspora accepted these as equivalents....
>
> Teutonic peoples had their own god-names—Wodan, god of the dead, Donar, god of thunder and the sky, Tyr, god of war. The Christian missionaries took over not these personal names, but the class word god, which denoted (according to the Oxford Dictionary) a superhuman person who was worshipped as having power over nature and the fortunes of mankind; and also an image or other object which

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Judaism. Consequently, the 'African Gods' should not be viewed as inferior to Allah, God or Yahweh. Among the authors who argue for the status of world religion for the African traditional religions is L Magesa, *African Religion*, 1997:18-28; O p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, 1970:1-2; F Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes*, 1984:2,17. Other prominent authors in this subject are JM Ela, *African Cry*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), JP Brown and S Perry, trans. *My Faith as an African*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), H Dinwiddy, "Missions and Missionaries as Portrayed by English-speaking Writers of Contemporary African Literature", in Fashole-Luke, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, pp 426-42.

[141] It is important to note here that the African evangelical theology disagrees with this position. Some of the African evangelical authors who have discussed this problem are: Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (1975); Lenard Nyirongo, *Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible?* (1997); Yusufu Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods* (1999). As far as Kato, Nyirongo, and Turaki are concerned, there is a clear discontinuity between the God of the Bible and the 'Gods of Africa'. This position is also shared by David Bosch (see his article, "God in Africa; implications for kerygma", 1973). Bosch, explaining his position, reasons that many African peoples (the Akan, the Mende, the Yoruba, the Nyakyusa and the Zulu) developed the idea of a primal ancestor into a divine figure (see Bosch, 1973:8). As far as David Bosch is concerned, even the name for God and the word for ancestors have a common root in many African languages (ibid: 10). This thought can also be detected in Harry Sawyer's *God: Ancestor or Creator*, London: Longman, 1970.

> was worshipped. Whatever it meant to our Teutonic forefathers it did not mean what it means to us today: Christianity took it and filled it with new content.
>
> Christian missionaries in Africa differ from their predecessors in Europe for they have generally adopted not class names like theos or god but personal names like Nyame, Leza, Nyambe (Smith, 1950:34, 35)

When these theologians talk about *Modimo, Nyame, Leza, Nyasaye* and so on they are not just intellectually aware, but at a deeper existential level they also know that they are talking about the God of the Christian message. That is why these African theologians insist that there is only one God and that that God has revealed himself to all peoples of the world. Setiloane wrote: "The black man still believes that Christianity comes from God (Modimo) so he clings to it although his mind is in a state of revolt against Western Christianity" (Setiloane, 1986:29). Consequently, for African theologians, to say that the God the traditional Africa knew is not the God we meet in the Christian worship is to deny the very truth of God's word which insists that God is proclaimed to all men everywhere (see Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20; 2:14, 15; Acts 14: 15-17; 17:21-31; cf. Eccles. 3:11).

As Hendrikus Berkhof has well said, in revelation "we perceive not just a something, an aspect, a segment of a divine mystery, but God himself, his heart, his deepest essence. We see in a mirror and thus do not see God face to face. But what we see in that mirror is God himself" (Berkhof, 1979:105). The different African peoples saw Nyasaye, Ngai, Modimo, Nyambe, Nyame, Leza and so on. For example, when a Luo talks of Nyasaye, he is not merely comparing the 'African God' to Yahweh, he is not referring to fate or a primal ancestor with attributes maximised to fit divine status, neither is he thinking of a spiritual mystery, proposition on or a mere segment of God. He is making reference to the revealing God, God himself. On this issue, even Byang Kato who is uncompromising on discontinuity, argues that the name the non-Christians give the Supreme Being indicates "man's awareness of the Supreme Being and man's rebellion against God. It also indicates deep search for the Reality in spite of the unconscious flight from Him" (Kato, 1975:114).

What needs emphasis in the African Christian thought is the fact that whereas Nyasaye (a Luo word for God) is referring to God himself, the presence of this name among the Luo people does not mean the Luo captured the full sweep of God. God is more than his revelation and moreover man is both in rebellion and limited by his creatureliness. In the words of Berkhof, "*God's essence transcends his revelation*.... No creature is capable of making the infinite and inexhaustible richness of the essence of God his own. Yet he does reveal his essence to us (Berkhof, 1979:106, italics his). Berkhof's statement applies to all peoples of the world. Although we are sinners, we have not lost the image of God so completely that we are left without a trace of it, and neither can we argue from the position of the Christian faith that God has not revealed himself to us in nature around us, in our consciousness and in our history. The issue therefore is not whether God revealed himself to some peoples of the world and not to others. The issue is whether the different peoples of the world were able to perceive and absorb the fullness of God's revelation. No one can perceive and absorb the fullness of God. God can only be known by God (see Job 38:2 and ICor 2:6-16).

9.3.3.5.The Problem of the use of the Christian theological terms

The last problem is what Idowu calls the "mistake of morbidly shrinking from any suggestions of similarities or identification between one category of religious terminologies and another" (Idowu, 1962:3). A good example here is found in the following excerpt of Andrew Lang:

> The phrases 'Creator', 'creative', as applied to Anyambi, or Baime, have been described, by critics, as rhetorical, covertly introducing conceptions of which savages are incapable. I have already shown that I only follow my authorities, and their translations of phrases in various savage tongues. But the phrase 'eternal' applied to Anyambi or Baime, may be misleading. I do not wish to assert that, if you talked to a savage about 'eternity', he would understand what you intend. ...
>
> With these explanations I trust that my rhetorical use of such phrases as 'eternal', 'creative', 'omniscient', 'omnipotent', 'omnipresent', and 'moral' may not be found to mislead or covertly import modern or Christian ideas into my account of the religious conceptions of savages (Lang, 1909:xxii-xxiv).

Whereas Lang is here shrinking from using the categories developed by theology to describe concepts found amongst the 'savages', others like Eric Waterhouse condemn those they think have 'illegitimately' used Christian theological terms to describe the concepts of the Supreme Being among the primitives (Idowu, 1962:3). Charles E Fuller, writing from the same point of view, suggests that "weighted terms such as omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity are . . . too interlaced with theological complexities of the traditions common to Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths to be used in any neutral sense when observing religions external to these" (Fuller, 1977:20). Fuller goes as far as suggesting that in the African context, we should rather "speak of 'divinity' where reference is made to 'god' or 'gods'" (Fuller, 1977:21).

Of course Idowu has made a point that is worth taking seriously. It is not true, as Lang, Waterhouse and Fuller seem to "think that other races apart from the Europeans are incapable of apprehending the Deity in those terms. Surely there are no ideas and categories, which are created to be the exclusive monopoly of any particular race. Why should it be impossible for the Deity to reveal Himself to other races and to the Europeans in similar ways?" (Idowu, "Introduction", 1962:3,4). Why should we be afraid to describe the Deity as he was known to the African in such terms as Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and so on?

9.4. On the Way to the Doctrine of the Trinity

9.4.1. Take a Realistic view of the General Revelation

So far African theology has concerned itself with the content of what the African peoples made of the self-revelation of God. Professor Mbiti believes that "African theologians are more or less unanimous in affirming that, God who is known in African religion is precisely the same God who is revealed in the Bible" (Mbiti, 1999:5). Prominent African theologians who hold this view are among others John S Mbiti (Kenya), Harry Sawyer (Sierra Leone), Bolaji E Idowu (Nigeria), Samwel G Kibicho (Kenya), and Gabriel M Setiloane (South Africa). JS Mbiti argues that one of the reasons Christianity has obtained a large following in the African situation can be attributed to the fact that "...

the message of the Bible is the message of the same God our people already knew, acknowledged, and to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices, from generations past" (Mbiti, 1999:6). This thought is of course in line with the sentiments of Brunner, who believes that

> Apart from real revelation ... the phenomenon of religion cannot be understood. Even the most primitive polytheistic or pre-polytheistic idolatrous religion is not intelligible without the presupposition of the universal revelation of God which has been given to all men though the creation. Therefore the Apostle, when he explains the nature of the pagan religion, speaks, first of all, of this universal self-manifestation of God to all men without exception through the works of creation and through the writing of the law upon their hearts (Brunner, 1947:59, 262)

Some of the theologians from the non-African extraction who hold this view are John V Taylor, E Geoffrey Parrinder, Edwin W Smith, and Malcolm J McVeigh, amongst others.

Of course we cannot deny the fact that the African peoples can and do conceive of God. We must be quick to point out, however, that such conceptions are blurred and of no salvific value. This yes-and-no principle in the traditional African conception of God could be summarised in the following words of George Peters:

> [The biblical approach] accepts the absolute predicament of man in a realistic manner, acknowledging on the one hand man's rebellion against God and his flight from God, hiding himself under the figs' leaves of man-constructed and designed religion and culture, -man's barricade against all that threatens him including God, ever seeking to perfect this covering and to control the power above and beyond him to the furtherance of his selfish ends. On the other hand this approach takes account of the fact that man lives as creature with an awareness that he is away from home, separated from true reality and life, with a "feeling of dependence upon the ultimate", with a guilt complex and a conscious of deserved judgment. Thus he seeks, gropes, longs to be restored to his rightful creature relationship and household membership, makes attempts to appease God, the gods, spirits, or powers to reconcile himself to or submit and control that which threatens him (Peters quoted in Kato, 1975:44,45).

Historically, belief in general revelation was often the symptom and result of a rejection of special revelation.[142] It is important to note, however, that general revelation and

[142] The nineteenth century Hegelian notion of the absolute Spirit in the human ego, reason and freedom opposed completely the revelation of God in Jesus as the only source from which we may draw our knowledge of God (see Berkouwer, 1955:11,12). Then increased knowledge of other religions, including the African traditional religions, resulted in a further generalisation of revelation. In the words of Berkouwer, "for many the denial of the absoluteness of Christianity became the background of the

scriptural or historical revelation are not in competition, the two are an integral part of the Christian message. African inculturation theology is obligated to clarify how God has been made known to the entire world and to all men without losing sight of the fact that this God appeared in the flesh. In the words of Berkouwer, "only there did God actually become manifest" (Berkouwer, 1955:294). This manifestation must be understood as a mystery (I Tim 3:16; Rom 16:25-26) for in the Son dwells the fullness of the Godhead (Col 2:9 and Gal 4:4). He revealed the name of the Father (Jn 17:6), indeed the Son alone has manifested the Father (Jn 1:18). We therefore cannot simply stop after mentioning that the various African peoples knew God as Nyasaye, Leza, Modimo, Mulungu, Nyame and so on. Having mentioned that the Luo, for instance, knew God as Nyasaye, we must be quick to add that Nyasaye appeared in the Flesh.

9.4.2. Discuss Revelation as the Self-Revelation of God

It is unfortunate that at some stage the African peoples were regarded as 'savages' who knew no religion except the worship of the devil. The basis of this position was the assumption that the African peoples completely lost the image of God so that no element of it remained. Today it is perplexing to us that such a view of things was ever taken and supported with zeal. The fact of the matter is that like other peoples of the world, the African people are sinners. The fall did not demonise them. Moreover, the first missionaries found and utilised what Andrew Lang, in his book *The Making of Religion*, (1909) has called the "reciprocal phenomenon". According to Lang, in their encounters with the 'savages', "the missionaries often find a native name and idea which answers so nearly to their conception of God that they adopt the idea and name in teaching. Again on the other side, the savages, when first they hear the missionaries' account of God, recognise it ... for what has always been familiar to them" (Lang, 1909: 228, 229). This idea of the "reciprocal phenomenon" challenges us to revisit the concept of revelation as it is formulated in the Christian faith and its implication on how God relates to Africa.

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dilemma: general or special revelation? They thought they could see one broad revelation of God in the background of the various religions, and they hesitated to see the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the revelation in Christ on the basis of *a priori* of faith." (Berkouwer, 1955:12). In the African context, the denial of the absoluteness of Christianity has taken the form conferring world religion status on the African traditional religions.

As Hendrikus Berkhof has said, in revelation "we perceive not just a something, an aspect, a segment of a divine mystery, but God himself, his heart, his deepest essence. We see in a mirror and thus do not see God face to face. But what we see in that mirror is God himself" (Berkhof, 1979: 105). The different African peoples saw Nyasaye, Ngai, Modimo, Nyambe, Nyame, Leza and so on and yet at the end of the day these are but different dialects of the same term: God (Idowu, 1973: 104). When a Luo talks of Nyasaye, for example, he is not merely comparing the 'African God' to Yahweh, he is not refering to fate or a primal ancestor with attributes maximized to fit divine status[143], and neither is he thinking of a spiritual mystery, propositions on or a mere segment of God. He is making reference to the revealing God, God himself. On this question, even Kato who is uncompromising on discontinuity, argues that the name the non-Christians give the Supreme Being indicates "man's awareness of the Supreme Being and man's rebellion against that God. It also indicates deep search for the Reality in spite of the unconscious flight from Him" (Kato, 1975: 114).

Generally, theology in the African situation has discussed the doctrine of God from the point of view of a series of truths and a number of neat theological propositions derived from the African myths. This could be seen in the titles of Edwin W Smith's *The African Ideas of God* (1950) and John S Mbiti's *The Concepts of God in Africa* (1970). In these works, the emphasis falls not on God who has revealed himself but on truths about God, what the African peoples say about God.[144] The propositions about God in the African

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[143] David Bosch argues that among many African peoples, notably the Akan, the Mende, the Yoruba, the Nyakyusa and the Zulu, a primal ancestor developed into a divine figure (Bosch, 1973:8). This thought can also be detected in Harry Sawyer's *God: Ancestor or Creator*, London: Longman, 1970. As far as David Bosch is concerned, even the name for God and the word for ancestors have a common root in many African languages (ibid: 10).

[144] Interestingly the African people put focus not on truth but on the God who exists. According to Magesa, it is the "place that God occupies in the order of things that human beings can speak of their own existence, let alone their tradition" (Magesa, 1997: 40). When it comes to the African propositions about the attributes of God, Magesa sees them as having been derived from "human experience of what is good and noble" (ibid.). This point can be interpreted in different directions. It could mean that the African peoples are in fact atheists, what they say about God are but metaphors maximised to fit divine status. But it could also mean that the African peoples perceive God as silent. This second option is the position taken by this paper.

myths pale badly in comparison to the truth seen in the Scripture. Idowu, for example, brings to our attention the Yoruba belief that Olodumare (God) brought forth orisa (divinities) as his ministers (Idowu, 1962: 60,61). The Scripture does not allow us to make statements like these. However, when we come across statements like these, we recognise an attempt on the part of fallen man deluded by Satan and living within the limitations of creatureliness to say something about God who is revealed and yet hidden.

What needs to be emphasised in the African Christian thought is the fact that whereas Nyasaye (a Luo word for God), for example, is referring to God himself, the presence of this name among the Luo people does not mean that the Luo have captured the full sweep of God. God is more than his revelation and moreover man is both in rebellion and limited by his creatureliness. In the words of Berkhof, "*God's essence transcends his revelation.* ... No creature is capable of making the infinite and inexhaustible richness of the essence of God his own. Yet he does reveal his essence to us" (Berkhof, 1979: 106, italics his.). Berkhof's statement applies to all peoples of the world as well as to the individual African ethnic groups. Although we are sinners, we have not so completely lost the image of God so that we are left without a trace of it and neither can we argue from the position of the Christian faith that God has not revealed himself to us in nature around us, in our consciousness and in our history. The issue, therefore, is not whether God revealed himself to some peoples of the world and not to the others. The issue is whether the African peoples, and of course all peoples of the world, were able to perceive and absorb the fullness of the revelation. Of course, as Berkhof says, "no one is capable of making the infinite and inexhaustible richness of the essence of God his own" and the African peoples are no exception to this rule. God can only be known by God (see Job 38:2 and I Cor 2:6-16).

Indeed it could not be possible for anyone to perceive and absorb the fullness of the revelation of God. This explains the reason why African ideas about God pale in comparison to the truth seen in the Scripture. Due to our creatureliness, God chose to employ the modes that come with the earthly life[145] to reveal himself but now because of

[145] Of course the earthly character of revelation means that the modes that are given with this earthly life

the human condition, we need a special revelation in order for us to be certain about the self-revelation.[146] In his interaction with our peoples, God had to accommodate himself to the conceptual forms and the existential traits of our peoples, not just because of our sin, the reality of the forces of darkness and our creaturely finitude, but also because of the hiddenness of God[147].

9.4.3. Address the Problem of the Hiddenness of God

There are two sides of the coin that we must put into perspective. There is our inability to see God clearly, but there is also the hiddenness of God. The hiddenness of God is not just true outside of special revelation, it is seen within the special revelation as well. Full knowledge of God is a promise that is reserved for the end time[148]. We thus see God, the true God, but in a mirror and not face to face.

The hiddenness of God is not a pet theme in Christian theology, however, its significance to the overall understanding of the God we have come to know cannot be underestimated. In his works, Thomas Aquinas describes God as the Unknown (Aquinas, ST. 1a. 3). Aquinas wrestled with the hiddenness of God so much that he preferred to use knowledge (*scientia*) within the realm of human things and wisdom (*sapientia*) when dealing with

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are the willing and the necessary instrument of the revelation of God, but equally important is also the idea of the divine accommodation (Calvin, Inst I, x, 2; I, xi; I, xiii, 1). God's revelation is limited by the earthly existence, but as Berkhof puts it his accommodation is not 'as if' (Berkhof, 1979:53).

[146] How the two revelations; general revelation and special revelation, relate to each other has been fiercely discussed by Barth and Brunner. Barth rejects the possibility of general revelation. Brunner, on the other hand, argues that it is because of sin that man has turned general revelation into a caricature. As far as Brunner is concerned, only as we see God in Christ can we again understand general revelation and get to be certain that God had previously revealed himself (see GC Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans: 1955).

[147] Barth has given a detailed study of this characteristic in CD II, 1 par. 27,1. Here Barth allows us to see that God is indeed hidden. And as Berkhof puts it, it is because he is hidden that he must be revealed. For Berkhof, revelation accompanies hiddenness in three different dialectical relationships: revelation presupposes hiddenness, revelation reveals hiddenness, revelation assumes the form of hiddenness (Berkhof, 1979:53-56).

[148] The indirectness of the revelation of God is taught by such scriptural texts as Jn 1:18, Ex 19:21; Judg 13:22; I Cor 13:12 and Ex 33:18-23. Of course the Scripture allows for a direct vision of God but only at the end of time.

divine things (ibid. 2a2ae.9.2). In the thought of Aquinas, no man can know God and love him rightly by his own resources, "it must be given to him from above" (ibid. 1a.38.1). Luther reminds us that God remains a mystery even in revelation. For example, Luther noticed in Ezekiel 33:11 that God wills salvation for all and this is powerfully demonstrated in the weeping, wailing and groaning of Jesus over the perdition of the ungodly. Whereas this remained true, he noticed that the same God willed some to remain in their sin (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 33: 139-140, and 146). As far as Luther is concerned, revelation does not solve the divine mystery, instead it confronts us with it. William C Placher, commenting on Luther's perception of the divine mystery, adds that

> We cannot imagine how the God of the entire universe will turn out to have been revealed in the crucified Jesus – in that sense God's revelation remains hidden – and yet we believe that this is so. We therefore literally cannot help thinking of a hidden God apart from Christ — and yet we believe that this way of thinking is only a sign of our failure to comprehend the mystery and love of God; for if we did comprehend, we would see how this hidden God has been revealed in Christ (Placher, 1996:50).

The hiddenness of God is something of a perplexity to the traditional African peoples also. Although he is hidden, he is not just some vague existential reality[149]. Most African peoples believe, as Klaus Nürnberger explains, that "there is no revelational relationship from him to man, nor is there, except in a few cases, any cultic relationship from man to him. All Africans seems to agree that he is basically unapproachable and aloof – whatever the reasons for this distance may be" (Nürnberger, 1973: 21).[150] David Bosch thinks that "the God of Africa is a silent God and his real essence remains shrouded in mystery" (Bosch, 1973: 12). According to the Zulu informants of Bishop Callaway, the *izibongo* (praise names) of Nkulukulu were no longer known (Smith, 1950: 106).

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[149] Klaus Nürnberger describes an existential as "a recurring, non-objectifiable, immediate experience like being loved, being doubted, being dependent etc. Existentials are at the root of genuine religious phenomena. They find their verbal expression in, but are also often overgrown by myths, images, philosophical speculations, personifications etc." (Nürnberger, 1973:21).

[150] Clearly Nürnberger has overstated himself here. It is not true that all Africans see God as unapproachable and aloof. This is true only in contexts where there is a strong sense of the intermediaries. David Bosch also fell into the same trap when he argued that the religious experience of the southern Bantus ends effectively with the ancestors (Bosch, 1973: 9).

> The oldmen say that *uNkulukulu* is *umVelingqangi*, for they say he came out first; they say he is the *uhlanga* from which all men broke off. The oldmen say that *uNkulukulu* is; he made the first men, and ancients of long ago; the ancients of long ago died; there remained those who had been begotten by them, sons, by whom we hear that there were ancients of long ago who knew the breaking off of the world. They did no know *uNkulukulu*; they did not see him with their eyes; they heard it said that *uNkulukulu* was. He came out where men broke off from *uhlanga*. He begat the ancients of long ago. They died and left their children. They begat others, their sons, they died. They begat others; thus we at length have heard about *uNkulukulu*. It was our ancestors who told us the accounts of *uNkulukulu* and of the ancients of long ago.
> Tell me if at the present time there are any who pray to *uNkulukulu*?
> There are none. They pray to the *amatongo* (men who have died) (Callaway, 1913:13)

Although the traditional Zulus recognize the hiddenness of uNkulukulu, they view it as a disturbing reality and they look forward to a time when uNkulukulu will emerge from his hiddenness.

> This then is what I maintain, if anyone says he understands all about *uNkulukulu*. I say all men would be glad to go to the man who says this to see him and to hear him; for in process of time we have come to worship the *amadhlozi* only, because we knew not what to say about *uNkulukulu*; for we do not even know where we separated from him, nor the word which he left with us. It is on that account then that we seek out for ourselves the *amadhlozi* that we not always be thinking about *uNkulukulu*, saying: "*uNkulukulu* has left us", or "What has he done for us?" (Callaway, 1913: 31)

The Lango of Uganda are similar to the Zulu in this regard. The Lango admit that they know nothing of Gabipiny (God -- literally the one who sees the universe). Gabipiny is watching the universe, but from a distance (Russel, 1966:12). The Venda do not say anything much about Mwali except that he is the highest in the hierarchy of beings (van Rooy, 1978:5). The Dinka solve the problem of the hiddenness of God by pointing to the mystery of life. A Dinka will say: I do not know the fine details about Nhialic (Dinka word for God), but because I have life I know Nhialic exists. Gabriel M Setiloane explains that no man has seen Modimo (Sotho-Tswana word for God). In a sense, Modimo is unkown (Setiloane, 1973:13; cf. 1976:80).

9.4.4. Indicate that Hiddenness has been revealed in the Son and the Holy Spirit

Nyasaye, Ngai, Modimo, Nyame, and so on, is hidden. The Zulu bemoans the fact that they know very little of uNkulukulu. The Lango admit that they know nothing of Gabipiny. It is amazing that in spite of there being so many African myths about God, we still find the African peoples admitting that they do not know God. This is not an 'as if' kind of situation. There is no pretence here. The Luo know that there is Nyasaye, the Kikuyu are aware that Ngai exists, the Sotho-Tswana believe that Modimo is and yet all these peoples and more admit that God is hidden from them. Different philosophies and religions may give all kinds of explanations to this puzzle. The Christian faith also has its explanation and only this option is available to the Christian theology. The explanation is that God alone can reveal himself. In the words of Karl Barth, God's revelation concerns "God alone, wholly God, God himself" (Barth, GD I: 87-95; Moltmann, 1981:140). The gist of this statement is that "God cannot reveal anything more certain, more specific, more living than himself" (Barth, GD I: 89).

The Son is the revelation of the Father. The Father is "wholly and utterly" in His revelation, that is, in Jesus Christ (Barth, CD I/1: 498). He is the Father's revelation and nothing more or less. In Jesus Christ, the Father "sets and gives to be known not something, be it the greatest and the most significant, but himself as He posits and knows Himself" (Barth, CD I/11:476). The Scripture also refers to the Son as the Word. The Christian faith knows that it's God (Modimo, Ngai, Nyasaye, Olodumare, and so on) is not silent. How could 'the Unexplainable' (Mbiti, 1969: 33), 'he who has nowhere or nowhen that he comes to end' (ibid: 31), 'he who thunders from the beginning' (Mbiti, 1970: 12,13) be silent? How could he who thinks and remembers all, the 'Great Muntu', who is the ultimate explanation of 'muntu' (personality) be conceived of as dead silent? Of course he is not silent.

The Son is the Word of God. In the beginning was the word, the word was God and the Word was with God. According to Barth, the Son is the "eternal Word of the Father who

speaks from eternity, or the eternal thought of the Father who thinks from all eternity, the Word in which God thinks Himself, or expresses Himself by Himself (Barth, CD I/2: 527). Already the African conceptual framework experiences the existential of Nyasaye, Modimo, uNkulukulu and so on in much the same way as the biblical Father. Moreover, it recoginises Nyasaye, Modimo, uNkulukulu not merely as God of Africa but as God of the Bible. If the existential and the person of uNkulukulu, for example, is the same as God we meet in the pages of the Bible, then the Christian theology demands that we state that uNkulukulu has revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

It seems to me that the theology that will be at the cutting edge is that which seeks to explain to the African believers what it means by uNkulukulu, for example, revealing himself in the Son and the Holy Spirit. To say that uNkulukulu has revealed himself in the Son and the Holy Spirit is not simply to add something to the old beliefs. It is to say what the Scripture expects; namely that God has made himself known in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This was the Good News to the Jews, and it should not be viewed as of less significance when it is applied to God in these discussions. As we pay attention to the revelation of God in the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are not only able to hold together both the hiddenness/transcendence and the nearness of God, but we are also able to make a clear statement on the uniqueness of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. For an African who traditionally understood God merely as hidden and transcendent and who could not access God even through an elaborate doctrine of the intermediaries, nothing can be more revolutionary than the teaching that God has revealed himself in the Son and the Holy Spirit.

9.4.5. Admit the Seriousness of the Intermediaries

In fact, the African idea of the mediators is a direct result of the belief among the African peoples that God is hidden (see Idowu, 1962:62). In other words, the idea of the divinities and intermediaries is the African version of the tower of Babel. Mbiti even sees the idea of the intermediaries as a necessary element of the African cosmology. He argues that

> The idea of the intermediaries fits well with the African view of the universe,

> which holds that the invisible world has its own life and population. The life of this invisible world is in some way higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person (Mbiti, 1975:63).

Although Mbiti sees the concept of intermediaries as a reality in the African religious consciousness which expresses the peoples' systemic network of relationships, he clearly distinguishes the mediators from God. [151] DC Scott, writing about Mulungu from the point of view of the Nyanja people, says: "... you can't put the plural with God because God is one. There are no idols called gods, and spirits are spirits of people who have died, not gods. ... Hence God is one, is a distinct person, cannot be identified with the powers of nature, nor confounded with spirits in general" (Scott, 1929:348, cf Berinyuu, 1988:8). The point made by Scott is that the Nyanja people, for example, know of idols or spirits, but they never talk of them in the context of Mulungu (God). Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the former president of Malawi, corroborates SC Scott's understanding of the distance that should be maintained between Mulungu and the intermediaries. According to him, his people:

> ... never use the plural form of Mulungu at all, for the simple reason that we did not think there were more such Beings than one. ... None of my parents and grand parents used the plural form of Mulungu or Chiuta. They always used the singular form. And they used the word many times within my hearing, especially when we were about to eat the new crop of maize or beans or when there was drought in the country or when there was death in the family. ... The fact that we used the plural form of mzimu [mizimu or aazimu, spirits], but never that of Mulungu (God) makes it plain that we never thought that spirits were gods, as writers are inclined to think. The spirits of the ancestors had to be prayed to, not because they were themselves the deities, but because they were the means of approaching the Deity, who was above everything else, including the spirits

[151] It seems to me that the concept of the mediators in the African traditional religions performs for the African steeped in tradition a function that deserves some clarification. According to the definition of Berkhof, religion "is a relationship with the transcendent and the absolute, but man can have such a relationship only through the immanent and the relative" (Berkhof, 1979: 14). If we accept this definition of religion and see the African religion as religion, then we see a situation where in the African religion, God is seen as expressing himself in the relative (the mediators) because God is seen to be passive. The implication of this is that at one point or the other, the traditional African must secure for himself the favours of the mediators. Here then is the difference between Christianity and the ATRs. In Christianity, God not only expresses himself in himself but his transcendence and immanence are also seen together. Consequently the worshipper does not try to secure the favour of God. Rather God in Christ has come to the Christian worshipper. By the work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian has been brought into communion with God and has no need for 'towers of Babel'.

themselves (quoted in Smith, 1950:60).

Regardless of how African thought may explain the idea of the intermediaries, the fact that it presents the Christian theology with difficulty refuses to go away. African Christian thought has not paid sufficient attention to the problem of the intermediaries. In the past, they have been discussed in the context of the doctrine of God. The problem with this approach is that we do not get to adequately isolate them and deal with them for what they are. Kwame Bediako defines them as "manifestations or refractions of a single God" (Bediako, 1992: 288). Bolaji Idowu, dealing with the problem in the context of diffused monotheism, understands the mediators as functionaries who work as they are commissioned by God (Idowu, 1962:62; cf. Schmidt, 1931:262-282). These functionaries may be divinities (Idowu, 1962: 49), serviceable family spirits (Lang, 1909:209-210), the spirits in a general sense (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 49,51), or the living dead (Gehman, 1989:54). Even the evangelicals do not seem to realise that the so-called mediators are no gods and that they cannot as a matter of fact be studied in the context of God. As a result of our inability to adequately distance the mediators from God, the African theology has also not been able to see the difference between Nyasaye, Modimo and so on and Baal.

Presentations such as these miss an important quality of God. God, as Berkhof puts it, is a "defenseless superior power" (Berkhof, 1979: 133-140). God is the almighty, but in his superior power he retreats to give us room in our rebellion against him. God gave room to the African peoples, like all other peoples of the world, but some African peoples, by formulating the concept of the mediator, preferred to use the freedom to withdraw from the intended communion with God. This is sin. Men everywhere, albeit in different ways, use the God-given space for themselves. When man worships the mediators and abuses his God-given room it does not mean that he who gave the room was no God. In the Old Testament we see continual and often futile pleading of the prophets, however, despite Israel's sustained rebellion nothing was added to or removed from the Yahweh of the covenant.

The Bible clearly indicates that non-Christians have gods and their images (ηιδαλον) and the Africans have no need to deny that this is a truth applicable to the African peoples also. The Yoruba recognises the supremacy of Olodumare, however they also have innumerable divinities. As a matter of fact, no one really knows the actual number of the Yoruba divinities, since they simply call them *orisa,* meaning "legion" (Gehman, 1989:125). According to Mercier, research has not been able to offer a reasonable account of the divinities of the Ewe of Ghana, Togo and Dahomey. The divinities among these peoples are way too numerous and complex (Mercier, 1954: 211). Generally, belief in divinities is prevalent in West African and some parts of Uganda, however the belief dwindles to insignificance as one moves into the central part of Africa, eastern Africa and southern Africa (see Gehman, 1989: 124). When we come across divinities, we cannot fail to take them seriously since the New Testament did not take them for granted. According to Friedrich Buchsel, the New Testament regards the gods as realities.

> It is evident from 1 Th. 1:9 that they are no gods in comparison with God, and from Gl. 4:8 and R[omans] 1:23 that they are not divine by nature but only products of human sin and folly. But [Paul] seems to see demons behind their worship (1 C[or] 10:19; cf. 8:5) so that we do not have here a purely intellectual dismissal (Buchsel, 1965: 378).

The Apologists also confronted the problem of the intermediaries. Michael Green suggests that the pagan world of the first and second centuries viewed the deities as sons or ministers of God.

> They were accordingly commonly regarded as subordinate agents of the one God. "The one doctrine upon which all the world is united", wrote Maximus of Tyre, "is that one God is king of all and Father, and that there are many gods, sons of God, who rule together with God. This is believed by both Greeks and Barbarians." Thus, ... worship offered to the subordinate deities as ultimately reaching the Supreme God (Green, 1970:130).

Here then is a phenomenon very similar to Bolaji Idowu's concept of diffused monotheism. The Apologists knew that the divinities obscured pure devotion to and direct worship of God. They thus confronted the divinities. Our approach to this situation should not be that of denying the involvement of the true God with the African peoples. On the contrary, on this side of God's creation the presence of God is everywhere but the reality of ηιδαλον (the gods themselves and their images) is also a truth that we cannot

deny. Emphasising that Nyasaye (a Luo word for God), for instance, is not a god or an image of god but God himself means also that we cannot equate Nyasaye with the mediators or the divinities.

9.4.6. Borrow a principle from the El in Canaan and Quas in Edom

Having made a distinction between Nyasaye and the mediators also confronts us with the need to admit that the Luo people, and all the African peoples for that matter, never knew Nyasaye as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nyasaye, in the original Luo understanding, seems to fall into the same category as the Edomites' Quas[152] or Canaanites' El (see Heureux, 1979; cf Bosch, 1973:12-17).[153]

According to Heureux, "Yahweh exhibits an extraordinary number of El characteristics" (Heureux, 1979:50) and there is no trace of polemic against El in the Hebrew Bible (ibid.:59). David Bosch, approaching this observation from another angle, explains that

> [God] appeared on scene as Yahweh, the wholly other, revealing himself to his people, and yet there was a degree of continuity between him and El. A certain amount of integration took place. Or to put it differently: Yahweh took over El: his names (eg El Elyon, El Shaddai, etc.) and his functions. El was king, creator, judge, the wholly other, the God to whom glory and honour belonged, the owner of heaven, the God of gods in the heavenly court (cf Psa. 82), the just and the righteous who supported the weak and the under-privileged, the gracious and the merciful God who could also anger, the God of all children of men. All these traits were subsumed and transcended in Yahweh. He revealed himself to Abraham and Moses as the Wholly Other, but he did this within the context of the religious world of the Semites. ... In this process he adopted many of the traits

[152] Scholars are of the opinion that the divine name Quas is of Arab origin and entered Edom with the incursions of Arab tribes in the 8th and 7th centuries BC (see M Rose, 'Yahweh in Israel – Quas in Edom?' in *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 4 (1977), 28 – 34; WF Albright, 'Islam and the Religions of the Ancient Orient' in JAOS 60 (1940), 283 –301; TC Vriezen, 'The Edomitic deity Quas' OTS 14 (1965), 330 –353; and JR Bartlett, 'Yahweh and Quas: A Response to Martin Rose' in JSOT 5 (1978), 29 – 38.

[153] David Bosch argues that from the beginning Yahweh was not completely identical with El. El appeared as Yahweh and yet there was a degree of discontinuity however in spite of this, Yahweh took over the names of El and his functions. El according to David Bosch, J. Blommendaal, Albrecht Alt, B. Gemser, Rolf Rendtorff, Otto Eissfeldt, Georg Fohrer, FM Cross and MJ Mulder was the gate through which Yahweh penetrated the Semitic world. According to Bosch the 'Gods of Africa' are like El. They must allow themselves to be taken over by Yahweh or else they are Baal (Bosch, 1973:15-17).

> and names of El. El was the "gate" through which he penetrated the Semitic world (Bosch, 1973;16; see also Heureux, 1979:49,50).

Commenting on the Edomites Quas, M Rose posits the view that the name Quas was applied to an already established Edomite god who would at a later stage be identified with the Isrealites' Yahweh (Rose, 1977:31). In fact, according to JR Bartlett (Bartlett, 1978:33) and TC Vriezen (Vriezen, 1965:353), Quas and Yahweh had similar characteristics. Grounding this argument, JR Bartlett says that

> ... it is quiet remarkable that the Old Testament, while firmly condemning Ammonite Milcom and Moabite Chemosh as 'abominations', neither names nor condemns any Edomite God. This difference in treatment requires explanation. It may be a matter of chance, or of Isreal's ignorance of Edomite belief, but perhaps the most likely explanation is that there was some awareness in Isreal that Yahweh belonged to the Edomite region and that Edomites themselves might be among his worshippers (Bartlett, 1978:33).

As is the case with El and Quas, the notion of God among the African peoples indicates a number of similarities with Yahweh. In fact, as Bosch has observed, the translators of the Bible into the African languages, "... experienced no difficulties in finding African 'dynamic equivalents' – for the God of Scripture – Modimo, Nkulunkulu, Thixo, et cetera" (Bosch, 1987: 40). This observation can allow us to see the African notion of God as in some ways similar to the idea of El or Quas. Consequently, we are in a position to distance the African notion of God from Baal, Milcom or Chemosh. In view of this it is therefore important that we reject the line of thought which clamps together the African concepts of God with Baal[154] or his equivalents.

The African evangelical theology has in the recent past come up with such terms as the 'Gods of Africa' (Nyirongo, 1997), the 'African Gods' (Turaki, 1999) or the 'Gods of power' (Steyne, 1989) to sustain the view that the African concepts of God are virtually interchangeable with the idea of Baal in the religions of the Ancient Near East. The Bible indicates that El, who came to be identified with Yahweh, was a foe of Baal. Mulungu, Modimo, Nyasaye and so on, as we have seen in the works of Bolaji Idowu, John S Mbiti and GM Setiloane show a number of Yahweh characteristics. As Christianity gets rooted

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[154] For a detailed study of El, Baal and Rephaim, see Conrad E L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods: El, Baal, and the Rephaim.* Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars Press, 1979.

in Africa and as Africans in their millions accept Christianity as their religion, Mulungu, Modimo, Nyasaye and so on will be increasingly 'Yahweh-ized'. It is the responsibility of the Christian faith in the African context to tell the African Christians what to make of a 'Yahweh-ized' Nyasaye, Modimo, Mulungu and so on.

9.5. Conclusion

African theology needs to move beyond the African concepts of God. Until now, this has not been possible, because African theology has traditionally stuck to the comparative method of biblical interpretation. Moreover, African theology has operated from the cultural identity paradigm that is structurally incapable of articulating the Trinity for the African context. These problems have shielded African theology from addressing the more crucial theological issues such as 'revelation as self-revelation', 'the hiddenness of God', 'God as revealed in the Son and the Holy Spirit' and 'divinities and intermediaries'. A proper understanding of these areas of theology is helpful in laying the foundation for the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Christ has made a difference to millions of Africans. As Mbiti once said, some Africans have "suffered, some have been tortured and others killed, not because of their belief in God, but for the sake of Jesus Christ and his message of Love, Salvation, Justice, Hope and Peace" (Mbiti, 1999:6). The Christ these Christians have suffered for is the Christ that we see in the Bible. If Christ makes such a difference, how is it that at the level of formal theology, the Christ event has not affected the African Christians' naming of God?

Part Four

From the African Concepts of God to the Doctrine of the Trinity

"Men of Athens, I observe at every turn that you are a most religious people! Why, as I passed along and scanned your objects of worship, I actually came upon an altar with the inscription, TO AN UNKOWN GOD. Well, I proclaim to you what you worship in your ignorance. The God who made the world and all things in it..." (Acts, 17: 22-24; James Moffat' translation of the Bible)

10. God as the 'Great Muntu' manifested by the Son and the Holy Spirit

10.1. Introduction

This chapter takes as its point of departure the statements of the first African bishop, Bishop Ajayi Crowther and the observation of W Robertson Smith. Bishop Crowther in his instruction to his clergy said:

> When we first introduce the Gospel to any people we should take advantage of any priniciples which they themselves admit. Thus though the heathens in this part of Africa possess no written legends, yet wherever we turn our eyes, we find among them, in their animal sacrifices, a text which is the mainspring of the Christian faith: 'Without shedding of blood there is no remission'. Therefore we may with propriety say: 'That which ye ignorantly practise, declare we unto you.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin' (see Page, 1910:282)

But in order to implement the above suggestion, one must be willing to reject the doctrine of the *tabula rasa* and especially the form that was applied to the African peoples. Robertson Smith has clearly argued that "...No positive religion that has moved men has been able to start with *tabula rasa*, and express itself as if religion were beginning for the first time; in form, if not in substance, the new system must be in contact all along the line with the older ideas and practices which it finds in possession" (Robertson Smith, 1923:2).

10.2. Christianisation of the African concepts of God

In a sense, what Bishop Crowther and Robertson Smith are concerned with here is what the Ghanian theologian Kwame Bediako has described as the Christianisation of the African past. Bediako argues that the Christianisation of the African past has served a valuable purpose of providing Africans with "cultural continuity".[155] In Bediako's

[155] A similar point has been made by Kraft, who has observed four areas in which the African cultures are already closer to Christianity than European cultures. The areas are: (1) the community aspect of the church; (2) ability to understand most of the Bible (the Old Testament, Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, James and Peter) whereas the Europeans understand better the Pauline letters written to the present day ancestors of the modern European; (3) moral and ethical practices -- examples given here are patience, generosity,

thought, the phenomenon of Christianisation has to do with the task of the African Christian thought which seeks to give the African religious heritage Christian meaning (Bediako, 1992: 9f.).[156] The main point of Christianisation, in this case, is what theology has discussed as the referentiality of God language. When the African says 'God' what does he mean? According to Gilkey, we cannot talk of the referent religious language when we have not yet been able to put our finger on the reality we are making reference to (Gilkey, 1969:20). In the words of Frederick Ferré, "... without the element of belief in the reality of a referent designated by the theological language, the distinctly religious character of this speech is sought in vain" (Ferré, 1961:160). When the African Christians talk of Nyame, Modimo, Nyasaye and so on in the context of Christian faith, they are making reference to God they have come to know in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

The issue of Christianisation has been criticised not just by African scholars, but by Western scholars as well. The African scholars think that the Christianisation of the African God language amounts to "intellectual smuggling" (see p'Bitek, 1971:88), while some Western scholars argue that "pagan terms can never express Christian truth" (Smith, 1950: 34). But in spite of these criticisms, Christianisation has both historical and pragmatic sanction. As Braaten has observed, theology gets into deep trouble when it has no interest in the referentiality of its own God-language (Braaten, 1981:23; cf Setiloane, 1976:229). When the Greek and other European languages gave to the Christian faith their own God names, they were in their own way 'Christianising' their indigenous

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politeness, and generally 'failure in love' which has been seen as the cause of the mushrooming of independent churches; and (4) effective means of communication -- use of proverbs, parables, dialogue, and so on (see Kraft,1976: 290,291).

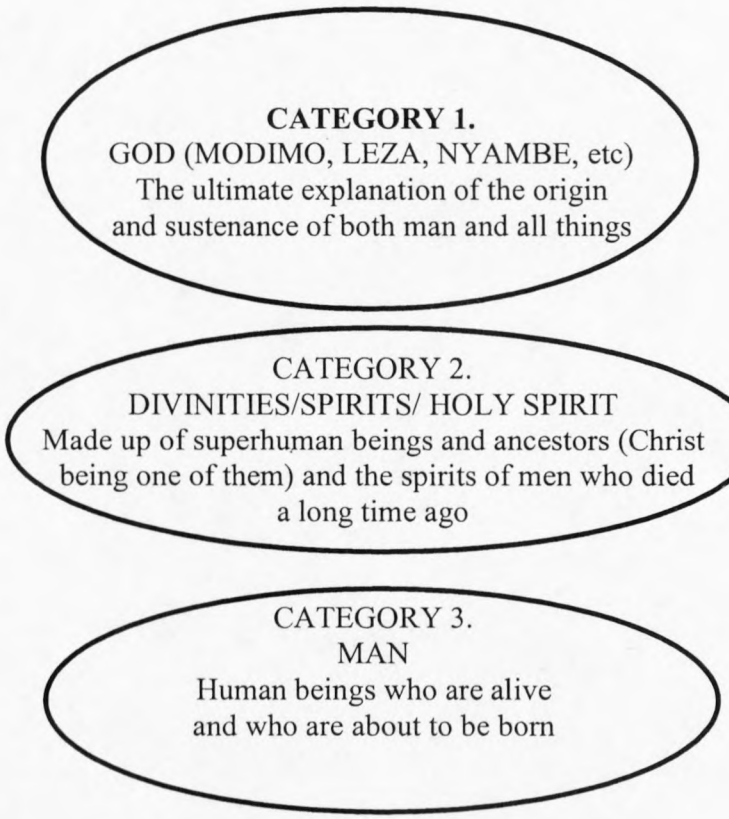
[156] Note that like Mbiti, Bediako is also moving with the conviction that the African traditional past is part of the *praeparatio evangelica*. Some African scholars such as Okot p'Bitek, Ali Mazrui, Setiloane, Christian Gaba, and Samwel Kibicho (see Maluleke, 1997: 11) argue that to view the African traditional religions as *praeparatio evangelica* amounts to refusal to look at the latter on its own terms. Okot p'Bitek called this kind of scholarship 'intellectual smuggling' (p'Bitek, 1970: 88). But perhaps the fiercest critic of the phenomenon of Christianisation of the African past is Ali Mazrui. Mazrui, formulating his point of view on the Christianisation in the epilogue of p'Bitek's book, writes: "Why should there be a constant search to fit African conceptions of God into notions like omnipotence and omnipresence and omniscience? Why should there be a constant exploration for one super-god in African societies, as if one was trying to discover an inner monotheism in traditional African belief systems? Why should African students of religion be so keen to demonstrate that the Christian God had already been understood and apprehended by Africans before the missionaries came?" (p'Bitek, 1970: 125).

concept of the divine. Christianity took the God names in the cultures and filled them with new content. This is what the Christianisation of the traditional African God language has achieved.

Christianisation of the African concepts of God means that we are prepared to fill the African God names with Christian content. The implication of this is that Nyame, Leza, Modimo, Nyambe, will no longer mean what they meant in their respective native contexts. The 'Christianised' Modimo, for example, will now be said to have made himself known in the Son and be worshipped in the Spirit. According to Karl Barth, this way of naming God distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian and must therefore be set forth clearly at the beginning of all Christian speech about God (Barth, CD I/1:301).

The trouble with mere Christianisation of the African concepts of God without regard for native metaphysics is that the cultures of reception do not know what to make of the Christian content. Michael C Kirwen, in a discussion with an African diviner, noted that the local language had no theological words to explain clearly and precisely the basic Christian doctrines. He noted, for instance, that his informant understood his explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity as tritheism (ibid.:5-22). He further observed that "... the very words used by African Christians to express doctrines such as the Trinity seem to have a life of their own and are continually used in contexts in which they have no meaning. The words themselves become the doctrine rather than the keys unlocking the doctrine" (Kirwen, 1987:23).

When a Sotho-Tswana, for example, hears that Modimo has a Son and both Modimo and the Son are worshipped in the Spirit, he processes the message according to Sotho-Tswana metaphysics that could be diagrammed as below:



An interpretation of this diagram presents us with a disturbing revelation. The three persons of the Trinity occupy two distinct ontological categories. Both the Son and the Holy Spirit belong to category 2 of the African cosmology and so they cannot be said to be God and known by such personal names as Nyame, Leza, Nyambe and so on. This is because God and the spirits, ancestors or divinities cannot participate in one life. God is God, the spirits are spirits, the ancestors are ancestors and the divinities are divinities. When Christ is said to be God incarnate, he is simply understood to be a 'superhuman being' paralleling what is known of heroes, the founders of different communities, and ancestors. He may thus be 'divine', but is just like the other beings in category 2 of the cosmology. He is a 'mediator',[157] but not in any unique way; the divinities, the spirits,

[157] The notion of Christ as mediator can be quite confusing to an African. For us the term mediator, when used in the context of the ontological difference between God and man, conveys the idea of an intermediate being between God and man. This is the role played by divinities, spirits, the living dead and in some cases chiefs. The mediatorship of Christ, however, is different. Christ is not a being between God and man, he is Logos who became flesh, in other words who is both God and man.

and the ancestors after all play the mediatorial role as well. This could partly explain the reason messianic movements so easily talk of 'African Christs' without a hint of embarrassment. The Holy Spirit is easily confused with either the spirits or the 'vital force'. The extent of this confusion is easily visible among most of the independent churches and the modern charismatic renewal movements.

Careful Christianisation of the African concept of God should first of all fully accept that God is one. Already the Africans know that God is one and that that God is the explanation of the genesis of man and the entire created order (Mbiti, 1969:16). Moreover, God in the African context is not a static substance or essence, and neither is he mere man on an infinitely magnified scale. On the contrary, he is the 'Great Muntu' (see Jahn, 1961:165), a 'subject' with the ultimate personality and thus distinct from everyone and everything else (Smith, 1950:21,22; cf. Setiloane, 1986:25; Scott, 1929:348). Although God is totally other, the Yoruba understand God, Olodumare, as "One with whom man may enter into a covenant or communion in any place and at any time, one who is supreme, superlatively great, incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, excellent in attributes, stable, unchanging, constant, reliable" (Idowu, 1962:36). It is as the 'Great Muntu' with keen interest in his people that God is freely said to be the Creator and the sustainer of the created order.

But how is the African Christian to understand the 'Great Muntu'? As we have already indicated, the African Christian thought must 'Yahweh-ize' the 'Great Muntu' and name him in trinitarian terms. This is a significant point of departure that must be deliberately addressed. The African context, as we have noted, knows monotheism, but the idea of God as Trinity is a completely new concept. The beginning of the concept of the Trinity is the incarnation. The Trinity is the focal point in Christian worship and the concept lays the claim that Jesus Christ is God. This thought is revolutionary to an African worshipper.[158] Because the African knows God by his name, to tell him that Jesus is

[158] For the African mind, the Trinity could as well mean that God created lesser beings who are godlike and have God's powers but who are subject to God (see Kirwen, 1987:12). However, what the African mind needs to be convinced of is the fact that the Son is in fact God himself and the Holy Spirit God himself, yet not three gods but one God. Note that in the mind of an African, the difference between beings is based on

Nyame, Leza, Nyambe and so on, is like telling a Jew that Jesus is Yahweh! It is met with initial shock, surprise and denial. This is because the Luo, for example, have never thought that anyone could talk of 'another' Nyasaye with seriousness. MC Kirwen, writing about Kiteme (a word he coined to convey the general notion of God among the African peoples) as understood by the Luo of Kenya, reports that according to the Luo, "there is no other God. There is no one else who approaches, is equal to, or shares Kiteme's power. Kiteme is alone, without family, without sons, without a community, without a lineage. Kiteme is totally different and apart from humankind, apart from all creation" (Kirwen, 1987:15). God is in a class of his own. He is above all things or beings, NTU. He is the explanation of the existence of NTU. But this, to be precise, is the scriptural position, 'another' Nyasaye while at the same time not more than one Nyasaye.

It follows, therefore, that the African theology should with urgency carefully and systematically Christianise the African sense of the 'Great Muntu'. The first Kenyan Luo Bible translators used the Luo concept of Nyasaye as referring to God made known in Christ. Wherever the term Father appears in the text of the Bible, the translators of the Bible rendered it 'Nyasaye Wuoro' (God the Father). Thus the Luo (my ethnic group) Christians see God (Nyasaye) and the Father (Wuoro) as mutually interchangeable concepts.

The concept of the Fatherhood of God has in the African context a primary connotation of universal creator. "Over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God" (Mbiti, 1969:39). The metaphors used in this regard include excavator, hewer, carver, creator, originator, inventor, architect, potter, fashioner (Mbiti, 1975:44). God alone is described as the one who fathered the world, owns it and cares for it and before he fathered the world there was nothing. Moreover, he is the unfathered Father of the divinities, of the forefathers and of all men, but he is distinct from the divinities, men

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degrees of forces (Tempels, 1959: 58-69; Masolo, 1994: 88). Above all forces is God. Tempels describes him as the "great, powerful, Life Force" (Tempels, 1959:28). According to Kagame, he is the first cause of all things or beings –NTU (Masolo, 1994: 91). He is therefore not NTU itself, but the "'Great Muntu', First Creator and First Begetter in one" (Jahn, 1961: 105). Therefore to state that Jesus is God is to say that Jesus and God have a common force, thus God is the great, powerful, life force, but Jesus too is the great, powerful, life force.

and the forefathers because he is not one of them. Being unfathered Father means that he is understood to be self-existent. "He is made by no other, no one beyond him is" (Bacongo). He was the first, has always been in existence and will never die. He came of Himself into being, he is he who speaks by himself, thus he is the speaker and the hearer, subject and object at one and the same time (the Bambuti, the Banyarwanda, the Zulu, and the Bena) (Mbiti, 1970:19,20).

The New Testament regards God as One and this one God to be the Father of Jesus Christ. In these writings, Jesus often referred to God as "my Father". The Pauline corpus view God as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor.1: 3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3) and at times simply as "our Father" (see I Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:4; etc.).

Thus although God is viewed primarily as Creator-Father in the African context, it is important to indicate that the idea of Fatherhood in the context of the Trinity has a rather different connotation. Fatherhood in the context of the Trinity means that God is the Father of the Son and the Spirator of the Holy Spirit, not in the sense in which he is our Father and the ultimate explanation of the invisible created world. Fatherhood here means that the Father eternally begets the Son and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father.

10.3. Inculturation of the Christian view of God

Whereas 'Christianisation' is significant, the real goal of African theology should be 'inculturation'.[159] Inculturation as a theological process is a dynamic interaction between

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[159] Maluleke (1997) argues that positing Africanisation as the new task of African inculturation theology, as Bediako does, may not be as ground-breaking as it may seem. He reasons that the proposal is based on juxtaposing Christianisation and Africanisation. But the concern of Bediako is clearly not to put a wall between that which is Christian and that which is African. The point of Bediako is that the Christian thought in the African context has done well to show the areas of continuity between the African culture and the Christian faith. And without taking away this credit, Bediako now urges African theology to engage in a kind of scholarship which utilises the African conceptual framework to explain the Christain concepts.

the Christian message and the culture of reception. In the process of the interaction, the Christian message is incarnated in the cultural milieu of the recipients and the culture is also impacted and changed by the gospel. The concept of inculturation is the equivalent of the 'Hellenization' of the Christian faith from the second to the fourth centuries of the Church. Under 'Hellenization' the Church utilized the Greek metaphysics to explain the Christian concepts to the indigenous Greek culture. In the process, the gospel was incarnated in the Greek culture but the Greek culture was also changed by the gospel. Similar principle is clearly noticeable in Augustine, Boethius and Aquinas, who were attempting to use the Latin metaphysics to convey the Christian view of *divinitas* to the Latin West. Inculturation as a theological strategy for the African context is an effort to use the African metaphysics to explain 'the new content', viz the Christian interpretation of Nyame, Leza, Nyambe, Modimo, and so on to the African audience. This is groundbreaking and it is yet to be done.

In order to inculturate the Christian view of God into the African conceptual framework, it is important that we first of all deal with the issue of the referentiality of the God language. God according to the Christian faith is the One who has revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This concept is encapsulated in the traditional theological language or formula 'One God Three Persons'. Having understood the referent designated by the theological language, we then seek to have a thorough understanding of the African conceptual framework. Mugambi warns that if this basic requirement is not met, we are likely to be heading for a "... mutual misunderstanding which would be difficult to reconcile" (Mugambi, 1989:58).

For the Africans, being – NTU is not just defined substantially. There are categories of existence such as IKINTU or the time aspect of AHANTU that cannot be defined substantially. The underlying principle here is that force and its manifestation are inseparably intertwined. God exists in a non-substantial category. Moreover, He is known to be a category of existence that is outside UMUNTU, IKINTU, AHANTU and

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This, in my opinion, is why Bediako took such pains to explore the significance of the developments of the Christian faith in the second century to modern Africa (see Bediako, 1992).

UKUNTU. In a way, God is unknown, he is not even tangible as wind, yet he is experienced at all points. He is experienced in ways other than "the world of senses" (Setiloane, 1973: 13; cf. 1976: 80). For this reason, some African peoples simply call God "the Great Spirit, the Fathomless Spirit, the everpresent Spirit or the God of wind and breath" (Mbiti, 1975: 53). Although the African peoples admit that they know nothing of the substantial nature of God (see Mbiti, 1969: 35: cf. 1975: 53), they insist that this 'Great Muntu' is "the source, originating in unrecorded time, of stream of life which flows into indeterminate future" (Setiloane, 1976: 80). The African peoples therefore do not describe God in substantial terms. In view of this consideration, the term that can best capture the unity factor in the context of the Trinity is the 'Great Muntu'.

Person (UMUNTU) in the African metaphysics is life force (see Jahn, 1961: 107). This is what remains when a man dies. Tempels calls it "genuine Muntu (person)". Tempels says that he "always heard the old men say that man himself goes on existing, he-himself, the little man who sits in hiding behind the outwardly visible form, the muntu that went away from the living ones" (Tempels, 1959: 28). Seen from another perspective, the "genuine muntu" is that dyanamic power which makes it possible for human beings to be in contact with ancestors, God and the wider society (see Louw, 1998:79). It is in this sense that Setiloane can view personality in human beings as "a tributary of the Supreme Vital Force" (Setiloane, 1986: 42). Consequently, to be person is not just to be divine, sacred, weird and holy (ibid.:13), but to be person is also to be in contact with God, mankind and the entire community (Idowu, 1965: 19; cf Mbiti, 1969: 108f.). Archbishop Desmond Tutu puts this point well:

> The African would understand perfectly well what the Old Testament meant when it said, "man belongs to the bundle of life", that he is not a solitary individual. He is linked backwards to the ancestors whom he reveres and forward with all generations yet to be born. ... Even today when you ask an African how he is, you usually in fact speak in the plural "How are you?" and he will usually answer, "We are well, we are here", or the opposite; he will not be well because his grandmother is unwell, his vitality will be diminished in so far as one member has reduced life force (Tutu, 1972: 20).

This understanding of 'person' is crucial for theology's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. It means that theology relevant for the African context must view 'person' not just as coinciding with 'human being'. Personality in the African context as we have already indicated elsewhere, can also be applied to God, spirits, and the living dead. Moreover, we cannot just describe 'person' as 'individuals with rationality' (see 'God as subject') or as 'pure relations' (see 'God as essence'). While a person has these qualities, what is determinative is that personality has to do with the capacity to be in contact with God, mankind and the rest of the community (see Idowu, 1965:19; cf 'God as community in unity').

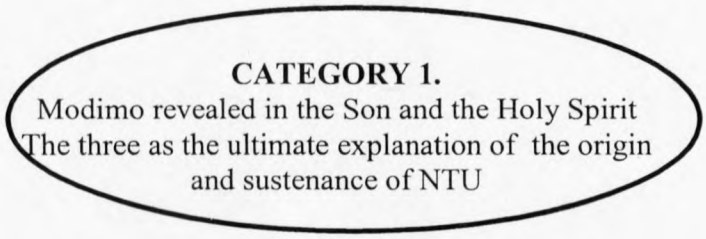
From the African metaphysics of -NTU, the Fatherhood of God in the context of the Trinity has several implications. First, it means that we are to continue to view God as "the 'Great Muntu', First Creator and First Begetter in one" (Jahn, 1961: 105). The significant metaphysical characteristics of this 'Great Muntu' as noted by Kagame include:

(i) God as an external existent: God does not form part of the four metaphysical categories and therefore is on the outside of created or qualified beings –NTU; He is external.
(ii) God as the Creator: God is considered as the existent which puts the existence [Fr. *l'exister*] of beings –NTU—there, and confers to them the property of reproduction and activity.
(iii) God as the conserver [Consevateur]: the actual existence of beings is thought to be regulated [begin and end] by his decision" (Masolo, 1994:92).

Secondly, the Fatherhood of God in the context of the Trinity means two things to an African reader. In the first place it means that the Father is to be understood as the Divine *principium.* The Father is the *principium* of the persons of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (see Calvin, Institute, I.13.2, 7f, 23). If the Father is the *principium*, then it logically follows that the Fatherhood of God also means that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a common category of existence (NTU) that is different from all other beings. Consequently, it is not only the Father who does not belong to the series of objects for which the African cosmology developed categories, the Son and the Holy Spirit too are not part of the four metaphysical categories which qualify created beings. The Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit belong to the divine category and in this category there is only one existence, the 'Great Muntu'. The Sotho-Tswana, for example, refer to this 'Great Muntu' (MODIMO) as *"hla'a-Macholo"* (ancient of days); "MODIMO *wa borare"* (of my forefathers — thus the forefathers know MODIMO better); *"Na Choeng Tsa Dithaba"* (whose abode is on the highest peak of the mountains); *"Mong'a Tschle"* (owner or master of all, Lord) (Setiloane, 1973:10; cf. 1976:80). The point of these attributes and names is that Modimo's existence is consistent at all points with the nature of Modimo and that there is only one such nature (see Setiloane, 1973:9,10; cf. 1976:80).[160]

Christian theology teaches that the existence of the Son and the existence of the Holy Spirit are consistent at all points with the nature of Modimo. But since there is only one such nature, one who shares in that one nature must of necessity be Modimo since it is impossible to talk of more than one Modimo. Thus we can talk of Modimo as having manifested or revealed himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This phenomenon can be diagrammed as follows:



Thirdly, the concept of NTU helps us to grasp the theological ideas of *homoousios*, eternal generation and procession. To say, for example, that Modimo is consubstantial with the Son and the Holy Spirit is to say that the three share NTU. Since there is only one NTU of God, and therefore that only an existence within the context of that NTU can be consistent with the existence of God, we can say with Hilary that the Son is a perfect

[160] To say that there is only "one such nature" of Modimo, for instance, is to say that God, according to the conceptual framework of the African peoples, is not a count noun. Because of this we cannot, for example, talk of Modimo in the plural. We cannot also say 'this is the same God as Modimo or a different God from Modimo'.

offspring of the Father, and consequently he is endowed with the properties that are in the Father (*di Trin.* 3.1; 2, 4). Elsewhere Hilary argues that the Son is derived wholly from the whole of His Father's nature (NTU), consequently he has the whole of his Father's nature (NTU), and thus he abides in the Father because he is God. The Bible identifies the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit is Divine because he only has the nature (NTU) of God shared by both the Father and the Son. Moreover, the individual existence of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is consistent at all points with the only Being (NTU) of the Father, viz the 'Great Muntu'. And so the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God.

Fourthly, NTU shared by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit allows us to talk of condescendence of God. As Semporè argues, "... already the Africans adored and affirmed God as the *Supreme*, the *Unique* whose personal name does not accept the plural, the *Powerful* without likeness, at last the living without father, mother or offspring, ... the source and guarantor of all living beings" (Semporè, 1994:31, emphasis his). This perspective on God meant that for the Africans, God must not only be distant but he is also neither a relative nor an intimate of human beings.

With the notion of *homoousios*, eternal generation and procession all concentrated in the concept of NTU, African Christianity must turn its own apprehension of God in a new direction. The model thus produced is God who has come to us in Christ and who indwells us in the Holy Spirit. In Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the Christian experiences the wonderous communion of the love of God.

Fifthly, whereas the NTU concept may be important in the interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity by the African audiences, it is worthwhile to note that we cannot apply the concept to the doctrine of the Trinity in an absolute sense. If we applied the concept of NTU in its absolute sense to God, we will understand him as "... the Supreme Vital Force" (Setiloane, 1986: 42) or simply power par excellence. The 'Great Muntu' will then be all powerful, existing as the explanation of all powers. This way of understanding God would suffice if we accepted a one-sided transcendental view of God. But the

Christian faith does not understand God simply as 'power par excellence'. God, worshipped in the Christian faith, brings power and powerlessness together in a profound way (see Berkhof, 1979:133-140). According to Berkhof, God who is present as almighty is also experienced as

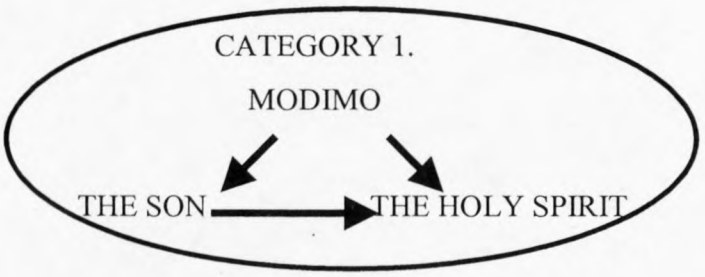
> ... the one who is hidden or angry or provoked or unrecognized. ... That is how we see him present in Isreal. ... God's history with Israel is to a large degree the history of a God who sees his plans fail and who repeatedly must react to the hostile or at least disobedient initiative of his partner, without apparently having (or wanting to have) the power to force that partner to his will (Berkhof, 1979:135).

In the New Testament's parables, the almighty God is depicted as a man who has gone on a journey and is therefore absent (Mat 24:50; 25:14; and Mk 12:1). The Son who is the revelation of the Father refuses to establish his Kingdom by force (Mat 26:51f.; Lk 22:38; Jn 6:15; 18:36) and instead renounces power and becomes powerless in order to bring succour to humankind and to the entire creation. According to Paul's letter to the Philippians: "Though he was divine by nature, he did not set store upon equality with God, but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant; born in human guise and appearing in human form, he humbly stooped in his obedience even to die, and to die upon the cross" (Phillipians, 2:6-8). On the cross we see the climax of the divine defenselessness. Here God is unable to save himself, the Father is depicted as in complete silence and as having deserted him who is his manifestation, and man triumphs over God by nailing the Son to the cross (Mk 15:31f., 34). The Scripture also depicts the Holy Spirit as the source of the power which the Christian has, yet the Holy Spirit is also depicted as defenseless. He must persuade men to accept the salvation of God and in most cases he is resisted (Acts 7:51 cf Isa 63:10) and even quenched (I Thess 5:19).

The defenselessness of God, or as we have said here, his weakness, implies a paradigm shift that is important in how we in the African context are to understand the 'Great Muntu'. According to this scheme of things, God is the 'Great Muntu'. He is all powerful, he is in a different category of existence and he exists as the explanation for all powers. Yet in the context of the Christian faith, we must understand the 'Great Muntu'

as a "powerless power". The powerlessness of God is the expression of his superiority. The Scripture is clear that in the weakness of God there is power par excellence, viz power that is stronger than man's strength (1 Cor 1:25). Here then is a different way of understanding the power of the 'Great Muntu'. He is powerful, but in a different way, in a hidden yet active sense.

We can organise the first category of the African cosmology in the light of the Christian information and have it look like this



10.4. The 'Great Muntu' as Community in Unity

The 'Great Muntu', according to the Christian faith, is not a monad. He has existed with the Son and the Holy Spirit from eternity. When the Christian faith talks of the Son, what is in view is not the 'son' concept as in the Shona-Ndebele understanding of God (God is seen as simultenously father, mother and Son), not the kingship concept found among the Shilluk (kings in this culture are seen as sons of God), neither is it the idea of the 'Nommo' (the appointed model of creation) found among the Dogon (see Mbiti, 1972:58,59). The term Son in the context of the Trinity refers to Jesus Christ. From eternity, the 'Great Muntu' has oneness of NTU and activity with the Son and the Holy Spirit. This oneness of NTU within the Christian context should mean at least two things. First, the Son and the Holy Spirit derive from the 'Great Muntu' and so the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively have the whole NTU of the 'Great Muntu'. Secondly, the 'Great Muntu', the Son and the Holy Spirit in fact exist in complete mutual indwelling in which each person, while remaining what he is by himself as the 'Great Muntu', the Son and the Holy Spirit, is wholly in others as the others are wholly in him.

How is it possible for the Son and the Holy Spirit to exist with the 'Great Muntu' in a complete mutual indwelling of each other? Perhaps the African view of 'person' can help us explain this problem for the African mind. The primary meaning of 'person' in the African context is 'the genuine Muntu' in me who seeks to be in constant contact with God and the rest of the community (see Tempels, 1959: 28). The 'genuine muntu' in human persons is only a 'tributary' of the 'Great Muntu' (see Setiloane, 1986: 13) or simply a reflection of the 'Great Muntu' (Idowu, 1965: 19). But to say that the Son is a person is not the same as saying that he is a person in the sense that you and I are persons. The 'genuine Muntu' that you and I have are but tributaries of the 'Great Muntu'. The 'genuine Muntu' that the Son has is the 'Great Muntu' itself. Thus the Son is a perfect reflection of the 'Great Muntu', the Holy Spirit a perfect reflection of the 'Great Muntu' and the Father a perfect reflection of the 'Great Muntu'. Thus the Son is a person in the ultimate sense, the Holy Spirit a person in the ultimate sense and the Father a person in the ultimate sense. Just as each of us reveal the nature of the 'genuine Muntu', the little 'tributary' of God in each of us, so the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fully reveal the 'Great Muntu'. No one can fully reveal the 'Great Muntu' except an ultimate person, and we know of three ultimate persons from Christian theology: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Persons cannot exist in isolation. These ultimate persons have always and will always exist in a community.

In his book, the *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989), JNK Mugambi recommended that the notion of "... 'persons' in the Trinity should be discarded because in the African mind they are misleading, vague and confusing. ... The best and most relevant way to understand the Trinity, we thought, is in terms of the *modes of God's manifestation to Man*" (Mugambi, 1989:75). Mugambi rejects the traditional presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity because "Greek philosophical influence was at work in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity and most Africans are not acquainted with Greek philosophy" (ibid.:75). He prefers the "modes of God" because this paradigm does not disturb the "traditional African monotheism" (ibid.:77). We are not getting into the problem of understanding the Trinity in terms of "modes of God" as

that has already been dealt with in chapter 4 of this research. What we need to say here is that the theological term 'persons' was not taken from Greek thought, the Father is revealed to us as a person, the Son who fully manifested the Father was revealed to us as a person, and the Holy Spirit too was revealed to us as a person. The term 'persons' is therefore constitutive of the concept of the Trinity and somehow we have to let it disturb the African cultural milieu if need be. As we have seen, there is no reason why we should believe that a doctrine of the Trinity formulated within the African conceptual framework must preclude the use of the term 'persons'. In fact, combining the NTU concept with the African idea of 'person' as discussed here presents the Trinitarian argument in terms that are very close to the lines of discussion the Church fathers observed.

Father Charles Nyamiti has also attempted to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. In his book, *Christ as our Ancestor* (1984), Father Nyamiti argues that God should be seen as 'the ancestor', Christ as 'the brother ancestor' and the Holy Spirit as the relationship between 'the ancestor' and 'the brother ancestor'. He defines 'the bother ancestor' "... as a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behaviour and with whom – thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death – he is entitled to have regular sacred communion" (Nyamiti, 1984:23). The concept of ancestors continues to be an issue in the African theology, however it raises fundamental difficulties when used as a model for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity: Are we sons of God in the sense in which Christ is the Son? Did Christ 'acquire his supernatural status through death'? How do we deal with the problem of the referentiality of the ancestor language in African nomenclature? These are hard questions for this model of explaining the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, as a matter of fact, this model of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is very similar to the Idealistic point of view. The only difference that Father Nyamiti has brought into the discussions is to call the Father 'The Ancestor' and the Son 'The Brother Ancestor'. As is the case in Idealistic theology, he reduces the Holy Spirit to a mere relation between 'The Ancestor' and 'The Brother Ancestor'.

10.5. Implications of understanding the 'Great Muntu' as Community in Unity on Christology and Pneumatology

10.5.1. Christology

10.5.1.1. Jesus in African Christianity

10.5.1.1.1. Christ from above

Within the African theological situation, we do not often come across a perspective of Christ which takes its starting point from 'Christ from above'. Most Christologies done by the African theologians prefer either 'Christ from below' or 'Christ from before'. YA Obaje, responding to this situation, proposes that the African converts will benefit most from the doctrine of Christ formulated from the point of view of 'Christ from above' or 'Theocentric Christology' (Obaje, 1992:49, 50). This Christology, as Obaje explains, emphasises that "God came in the human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. There is a God-centred or God-ward approach here to the doctrine of Christ" (ibid.).

By proposing a 'Theocentric Christology' Obaje is clearly concerned with the African theologians' tendency to confound the Son with the creatures. However, a 'Theocentric Christology' or 'Christ from above' sees the Son and the Father as having a common NTU - the NTU which is known to be God's. Thus, as Calvin would argue, the NTU of God is one, "... hence the whole Godhead is revealed in the flesh" (Calvin, CW, 40, 56). The Son therefore is categorically distinct from the divinities, the spirits, the ancestors and the rulers because the Son is God. Since he is God he is the 'Great Muntu', the 'great powerful, Life Force'. Divinities, spirits, ancestors, and rulers are powerful, but their power is derived from the ultimate source - God.

If Christian theology says the Son is divine, as far as the African metaphysics is concerned that statement means that the Son has, in common with God, "the great, powerful, Life Force" (see Tempels, 1959: 28; cf Jahn, 1961: 104f.) which characterises only God. In other words, his nature is consistent at all points with the only nature of

God, and like God, he is the explanation of –NTU. Due to these factors, the Son is God in the very sense of Nyasaye, Modimo, Nyame, Leza, Nyambe and so on. He therefore does not belong to some lower order of divine reality; rather he is God himself. In the words of Obaje,

> The coming down of God on a long chain from heaven in African myths of human alienation from God must be seen as a perversion of truth and an imperfect understanding of God's self-disclosure as a result of sin. However it is significant for the African convert to know that the very God who used to come down on a long chain from heaven to assist the creatures has finally come in the human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. ... There is no longer any need for them to return in search of the God of the traditional African worldview. The same God, who indeed is the God of all creation, has finally come in Jesus Christ (Obaje, 1992:50).

But the soteriological argument perhaps gives us a better view of Christ 'from above' as understood within the framework of the NTU concept. The Son sets us free from the bondage of divinities, spirits, and ancestors because he is God. Cases of exorcism of the possessed[161] in the authority of Jesus are numerous in Africa. The Africans understand that one cannot play around with categories that have greater power without serious consequences. In the words of Tempels, "one force that is greater than another can paralyse it, or even cause its operation totally to cease" (Tempels, 1959: 57). The Son causes the powers of divinities, spirits, ancestors, and even of witches to diminish or cease because he himself is the Ultimate Power.

Although the context of Africa requires that salvation bequeathed to us by the Son be understood as including freedom from the bondage and influences of the divinities, the spirits and the ancestors, it is important that we see the victorious Christ as the manifestation of the defenseless almighty God. Christ's power cannot be compared to

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[161] AFC Wallace has defined possession as "... any native theory which explains any event of human behavior as being the result of the physical presence in a human body of an alien spirit which takes control of the host's executive functions, most frequently speech and control of the sketal musculature" (Wallace, "Cultural Determinants of Responses to Hallucinatory Experience", *AMA Archives of General Psychiatry*, no 1, 1959:59). According to Wallace, possession is the explanation of such behaviors as (1) obsessive ideation and compulsive action, (2) hysterical dissociation including multiple personalities, fugues, somnambulism, and conversion hysteria and (3) hallucinations (ibid: 59,60). J Beattie emphasises the individual's state of dissociation, claim to illness or unusual behavior attributable to the outside agent who inspires the individual to act in a particular manner or displaces the individuals' personality and acts in its stead (Beattie, *Other Cultures*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964:229).

the powers of the divinities, the spirits and the ancestors. Since he is God, he is almighty. However, there are times when, from a human point of view, it will look like the divinities, the spirits and the ancestors have defeated Christ. In situations like these, Calvin advises us to listen to the message of the Holy Scripture and the appeal of the cross of Christ (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 18,4). From the Scriptures we learn about the mystery of the cross and thus the principle that "... the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor 1:25).

Even our salvation and the victory that we have won in Christ must be understood in the context of the power and the powerlessness of Christ. In a context like Africa, where demons, spirits, disease and poverty are realities, this way of understanding Christ and his salvation is crucial. In a context like this it is very easy to fall into the trap of triumphalistic Christianity. The Son who himself is the 'Great Muntu' became man so that we in turn can become one with God and live in victory. From a human standpoint, becoming one with God means that we have full access to power par excellence. But the Scripture provides us with the way in which we are to understand the divine power. In contexts of power encounters, the spirits, the divinities and the ancestors will melt away before us, but our joy should be that our names are written in the book of life. Again we can live as conquerors enjoying remarkable abundance, harmony and peace, but then there are these warnings: we must not avenge ourselves and we must be prepared to suffer.

10.5.1.1.2. Christ from Below

In the recent past there has been an emergence of the understanding of Christ based on titles that are specifically African in origin or emphasis. Some of the titles used include Friend, Liberator, elder Brother, Ancestor, King/Chief, Elder, Healer, and Master of Initiation. These Christologies seek to establish a relationship between the historical Jesus, the impression his followers had of him, and the implications of such impression on the socio-cultural and political history of modern Africa. The focus of these 'Anthropocentric Christologies' is twofold. Firstly, they seek to locate the equivalents of

biblical titles for Jesus in local African languages. Secondly, they intend to posit the view that God in his humanity identified with our humiliation, sin and death. In Christ, God has defeated the spiritual forces and taken all our diverse sufferings upon himself. Indeed, God is not aloof, rather he is with us in our diseases, poverty, famine, political unrests, ignorance, sin and even death. Because of the socio-cultural and political climate of the African continent, the African peoples can and do understand Christ as Friend, Liberator, elder Brother, Ancestor, King/Chief, Elder, Healer, and Master of Initiation and so on [162].

Of course the New Testament gives us a picture of Christ 'from below'. He was a true man, a Jew by race. As is the case with many African peoples, he himself lived in a hostile environment and suffered different kinds of oppression. According to Zablon Nthamburi,

> For Jesus there is no question of neutrality or compromise in relation to evil and injustices. There can be no neutrality in the face of injustices and oppression, domination and exploitation. ... We are reminded that in Africa there is always a struggle between good and evil, justice and injustice, righteousness and unrighteousness. ... We cannot tell victims of injustice and inhumanity that God is only concerned about their spiritual lives. ... We need Christ who in His humanity suffers with us, is deprived with us, fights with us and identifies wholly with our situation (Nthamburi, 1989:58).

Clearly, as Nthamburi and the others have stated, there is a place for 'Anthropocentric Christology' in the African Christianity. Jesus never took a neutral view of evil and injustice, neither did he limit his ministry to the spiritual. He was a rabbi, a prophet, a miracle worker, a sage, a deliverer, a healer, a protector and so on. How could he combine so much? The simple answer is that he was all these and more because he did not fit any of these descriptions. He was the 'Great Muntu' himself. In the words of Calvin, in Jesus Christ God brings himself "... within the reach of human understanding, humbles himself and makes himself small" (Calvin, CW, 55, 227). African Christianity cannot take this message for granted.

The African inculturation theology has identified and applied in Christian thought the

[162] A bibliography indicating the contributions of African theologians to Christological debates has been furnished in one of the sections of chapter 9 of this research.

equivalents of biblical titles for Jesus in local languages. But how adequate are the equivalents? Should we merely describe Christ as an 'ancestor', a witchdoctor - *sing'anga* par excellence[163] or the liberator after the brave warriors and chiefs known by the different African peoples? Of course as Kwame Bediako has argued, the experience and the actuality of Jesus as intended in the Christian affirmation can inhabit 'nana' (Akan word of ancestor), '*sing'anga*', and so on. It is also true as Bediako argues that "the exegesis of biblical words and texts is not to be taken as completed when one has established meanings in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek; instead, the process needs to continue into all possible languages into which biblical faith is received, mediated and expressed" (see Bediako, 1998:110). However Christology and Pneumatology formulated using the equivalents of biblical titles in local languages face us with an acute problem of referentiality that is deeply rooted in the very consciousness of the African peoples and in the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Christ differs from the traditional healer not just in degree as John Pobee suggests (Pobee, 1979:87, 93, 94), he differs from the traditional healers (see Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor*, 1985:10) in a very fundamental way — he is God; the healers are creations. Similarly, he differs fundamentally from such tribal liberators as Gor Mahia and Okore Ogonda.[164] In view of the fixed hierarchical nature of the African cosmology we therefore cannot just redirect these titles away from the categories in which they properly belong to Christ. Christ is God, he belongs to the divine category and so he heals and liberates as God. It is important that we achieve some degree of complete otherness of Christ if we are going to succeed in planting a Theocentric Christology in the African Christian consciousness. The traditional healers and liberators are men and so whatever powers they have are but derived from God.

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[163] Aylward Shorter takes the Chewa word *sing'anga,* which describes the traditional specialist in medicine, psychiatry and religion, and applies it to Christ (Shorter, 1985).

[164] The Luo, my ethnic group, has myths of the liberators of the tribe. The well-known heroes and liberators among the Luo are Gor Mahia and Okore Oganda.

10.5.1.1.3. Christ from Before

The notion that views 'Christ from before' is also present within the African Christian scene. Judith M Bahemuka advances this view in her article, "The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion", in *Jesus in African Christianity* (1989). However, an interesting and a more thorough work in this regard is John S Mbiti's essay "Is Jesus Christ in African Religion?" in *Exploring Afro-Christology* (1992). In this composition, Mbiti argues that Jesus Christ is present in the African religion. Supporting his argument, he uses the sayings of Jesus about himself,[165] theological terms often applied to Christ[166] and the view that Jesus is present in the African religion through the presence of God[167]. The logical conclusion of this argument is the view that the cosmic Christ saves the African peoples through the African traditional religion[168].

It is legitimate to understand Christ from the point of view of 'Christ from before'.

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[165] JS Mbiti uses at least five sets of passages to argue his point. (1)The first passage is the one which says that Abraham saw Jesus and rejoiced (John 8). According to Prof Mbiti, if Abraham saw Jesus, what about the Africans who believe in the same God? (2) Jesus is presented in the Bible as the 'Light of the world'. Did he not shine in the African religion also? (3) Then comes the symbol of the 'Good shepherd'. Could we include the followers of the African religion among "the other sheep"? Did the other sheep know him as their 'Shepherd'? (4) There is also the Scriptural teaching of the oneness of Jesus with the Father. Can we not say also that seeing the Father is tantamount to seeing the Son? (5) Lastly, Mbiti makes reference to the eschatological meal in the Kingdom of God. Among the guests are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets. We also see there the unidentified throngs of guests, including people from outside of the biblical circle of believers. Will the people who believe in God but are within the context of the African religion be part of the party?

[166] Among the biblical witnesses which Mbiti uses in this regard are the concept of the 'Logos' (Jn 1:1-9, 14), the idea of Jesus as 'the saviour of the world' (Jn 4:42), the appearance of 'his star in the East' to the Magi who were not followers of the Old Testament (Mat 2:1-12), the application of the metaphor 'rock' to Christ (Icor 10:1-4), the notion of Jesus as 'the first and the last' (Rev 1:17).

[167] Mbiti argues that the "African traditional religion has not pronounced the name of Jesus Christ. But we might venture that He is present though the presence of God. He is the unnamed Christ, working in the insights that people have developed concerning God, in as far as these insights do not contradict the nature and being of God as revealed more openly in the New Testament" (Mbiti, 1992:28).

[168] In the contemporary African scene, there is a tendency to see Christ as the fulfiller of the African traditional religions. From this position, some theologians and movements see God's way with Israel as accidental and therefore in principle interchangeable with preparations in the African traditional religions. The logical conclusion of this position is the argument that the African traditional religions can take over the role of the Old Testament. The problem with this position is that Christ of the New Testament does not only lose his concrete redemptive function, but he is also reduced to the level of a mere cosmic principle. This position is clearly indicated in EE Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965: 2,3). We can deal with this problem effectively only as we emphasise the non-

Christ's work is seen in man's conscience, in nature and in history. Christ could have revealed himself to the pre-Christian African people if he so willed. God is not confined. However, as Calvin argued, it is not upon us to speculate; rather, we should restrict ourselves to the channels through which God wills to act towards us. In the words of Calvin, "... all those who have wished to come to the knowledge of God have always had to be guided by the same eternal wisdom" (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 8, 5). Calvin uses "wisdom" here in the sense of Logos, the eternal Word of God. This view of "wisdom" comes out clearly where he argues that "... among the heathen there has been no revelation of God apart from Christ as also among the Jews" (Calvin, CW, 51, 169ff).

But acknowledging that there is no revelation of God apart from Christ means that we are to understand 'Christ from before' in the context of the promises of the Old Testament, the incarnation and the proclamation of the New Testament. The incarnate Son clearly understood himself as Logos, but he also saw himself in the light of the Old Testament ('Christ from behind'). In view of this, one should accept the place of the cosmic Christ or 'Christ from before'; however, such an acceptance must note that the cosmic Christ cannot be understood apart from the incarnation and the biblical witness.

Why can't we talk about the cosmic Christ without making reference to the incarnation and the biblical witness? The simple response is that by talking of the cosmic Christ we are talking about God. The problem as Calvin has elucidated it for us is that "... all we think and speak about God ... is but vain folly and empty words" (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 13, 3). Because of the weakness of the human mind we cannot fathom and grasp the full sweep of God (ibid., 6, 4). Logically then, in and of ourselves we cannot comprehend the cosmic Christ. If we wish to say anything about God we must be taught by God himself. In this regard Calvin argues that "... we must go to the Word, in which God is clearly and vividly mirrored for us in his works, and where the works of God are appraised not by our perverse judgments but by the criterion of eternal truth" (ibid., 6, 3). We meet God personally only in the incarnate Word, not in the 'cosmic Word'. The incarnate Lord,

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exchangeableness of the Old Testament.

however, is no longer among us. Although he is no longer among us, "... he has left us the word of His witness. As he himself is the mirror of God, so the word of Scripture reflects the grace and truth of Christ" (Niesel, 1980:35). In short, if we wish to articulate any aspect of Christian doctrine, we must be prepared to be students of the Holy Scripture (ibid., 6, 2).

10.5.1.2. Towards a Comprehensive Christology for the African Christianity

The Christian faith views Christ as arising 'from above' (Christ as the Word), 'from below' (the application of the methodology of historical investigation), and 'from before' (the Cosmic Christ). To these we could as also add 'Christ from behind' (Christ arising from the Old Testament problematic and giving answer to it) (see Berkhof, 1979:267-280). The view of this research is that these four approaches to Christology should be seen as both necessary and complementary. The African Christians need a Christology that allows them to clearly see Christ as the incarnate Lord, they need a Christology that is structurally capable of addressing Africa's multi-faceted problems. They need a Christology which takes into consideration the significance of Jesus for all ages and all men, and they need a Christology which arises from the biblical problematic. Not one of the four approaches singled out here can satisfactorily address these needs. If this understanding of Christology is taken for the African Christianity, then the four approaches are to be seen as essential to a balanced Christology and none of them is adequate taken in isolation.

10.5.2. Pneumatology

Pneumatology is a difficult area in African theology. There are two reasons for this. First, the African people understand God as Spirit (*moya*). It is in view of this that there is no physical representation of God among the peoples of Africa (Mbiti, 1994:102). Due to this understanding of God, the Holy Spirit is understood as referring to the spiritual (versus the physical) dimension of God. The incarnate Christ, in this case, becomes the physical dimension of God (ibid., 104). The second reason has to do with the 'spirits' in

African cosmology. Most of the African peoples believe that there are two kinds of spirits: those that were once human (ancestral spirits) and those that were never human (see Mugambi, 1989:64). In some communities, for example the Banyore, Segeju, Lugbara, Sukuma, Alur, Ankole and the Luo, belief in spirits was so strong that they had cults of spirit mediumship to deal with spirit possession (see Beattie and Middleton, 1969).

The concept of the Holy Spirit thus presented the first translators of the Bible into the African languages with a special difficulty. There are African words for "Holy" and "Spirit", but as Mbiti explains, "... the combination which gives us the "Holy Spirit" as part of the Trinity, is specifically Christian heritage (Mbiti, 1994:103). In the context of East African peoples for instance, the Kiswahili word "Roho" was adopted to represent the concept of the Holy Spirit, instead of the vernacular words for spirit (Mugambi, 1989:65). Although the new concept "Roho" as the third person of the Trinity has been planted into the African languages, due to the traditional interferences the exact reference of the theological term "Roho" has remained elusive to many African Christians. Dr Nathaniel Ndiokwere, in his book *Prophecy and Revolution* (1981), when referring specifically to the African independent churches, charges that among these groups there is a "general confusion caused by misunderstandings of the biblical meaning of the Holy Spirit" (Ndiokwere, 1981:257).

What to make of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not just a problem to the African independent churches. It is a problem for the entire the African Christianity and it can be traced back to the concept of the spirits in African cosmology. Because of the spirits in the African cosmology, a number of African Christians have simply replaced beliefs in spirits by the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In his study of Pneumatology in the African context, E Andersson noted this trend when he said that the African popular theology has let the doctrine of the Holy Spirit "be the wide gate through which a number of pre-Christian conceptions have entered" (Andersson, 1958:109). Sundkler believes that the African popular theology makes no distinction between the Holy Spirit of the Bible and the concept of power in the traditional African thought

(Sundkler, 1961:244). Martin and Oosthuizen also share this view. According to Martin, the African popular theology regards the Holy Spirit as power *par excellence,* "... the man in the African traditional religion is most concerned to increase his vital power . . . so the Zionist is most deeply concerned to get hold of the power of the Spirit" (Martin, 1964:113). Oosthuizen, on the other hand, notes that the African popular theology views the Holy Spirit as a simple continuum of the African traditional view of the vital force, the spirits and ancestors (Oosthuizen, 1968:129, 133,134; cf Sundkler, 1961:200).

It is true that some sections of the independent church movement have tended to confuse the Holy Spirit with the 'spirits'. However, to say that all independent churches have fallen into this error is to make a statement that cannot stand the rigour of scientific validation. In any case, at the level of fundamental outlook, as Kirwen has observed, "all Christian communities in Africa, are of necessity, developing religiously like the African independent churches" (Kirwen, 1988:28) despite appearences to the contrary. The African independent churches are also moving towards the historical churches. Allan Anderson, doing studies among the African Pentecostals in South Africa, has observed that

> African Pentecostalism has Africanised Christian liturgy in a free and spontaneous way that does not betray essential Christian character, and liberates it from the foreignness of European forms. African Pentecostals are among the most committed churchgoers in the townships. They have experienced the living Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit; and their lives have been radically changed as a result. This conversion, or 'born again' experience as the *bazalwane* call it, has so transformed their lives that they do not have any time for traditional practices. Unlike any other church group they have almost unanimously rejected the ancestor cult and traditional divination (Anderson, 1992:119).

The above observation indicates that not all independent churches have compromised the Christian view of the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course many independent churches can be faulted on many issues of theology and spirituality, however, there is no doubt that the independent churches are committed in their own ways to inculturation. Instead of blaming the independent churches, theology should admit that the Church has not always had a strong Pneumatology and that the African church in particular needs to rethink its Pneumatology and have it address the problem of spirits and spirit possessions in the

African context.

Already, the African peoples know that God is *moya* (spirit). Since he is *moya*, he is called the "Great Spirit, the Fathomless Spirit, the Everpresent Spirit, or the God of wind and breath" (Mbiti, 1975: 53). According to the Ashanti, the Shona, the Ewe and the Kagoro, God is the Saving Spirit and the Protecting Spirit who made all the spirits in the universe. The Ga, the Bena and the Banyarwanda believe that God is like wind, he comes and goes (Mbiti, 1970: 23, 24). Of course, as the African peoples believe, God is essentially *moya.* God keeps the order of NTU because in him is the 'Great Muntu', *moya* who is ever active, initiating action, and maintaining interaction (see Setiloane, 1986: 28). The African peoples thus knew the cosmic Spirit and understood his operations (see Mugambi, 1989:78). But having said that, we must quickly add that when Christian theology talks of the Holy Spirit it is referring to a specific hypostasis of God which is both active and radically Christocentric.

Of course the African description of *moya* as set in the above paragraph fits the biblical picture of the Holy Spirit. The Bible depicts the Holy Spirit as God's active presence in the world, in human history and in human experience. As the 'Great Muntu' he sustains the universe. JV Taylor using the African concept of 'force' (NTU) describes the Spirit as the life force of creation.

> From within the depths of its being [the Spirit] urges every creature again and again to take one more tiny step in the direction of higher consciousness and personhood; again and again he creates for every creature the occasion for spontaneity and the necessity for choice, and at every turn he opposes self interest with a contrary principle of sacrifice, of existence for the other (Taylor, 1972:36)

As sustainer of creation, the Spirit can therefore be said to be having power *par excellence*. However since the Spirit is the manifestation of the 'Great Muntu', we are to understand his power in the context of his powerlessness. He thus brings together power and powerlessness in a profound and a different way. This means that he has power *par excellence* but at the same time some things happen in the world which he sustains that the human observers may interpret as indicating absence of his power.

The Holy Spirit as a hypostasis of God is depicted by the Christian faith as radically Christocentric. This is evident in Luke's Acts 1:8 which depicts the work of the Spirit as empowering the disciples of Christ to be "my witnesses". FD Bruner, sees the Gospel According to St John as offering the most comprehensive Christocentric approach to the Holy Spirit. He observes the following:

1. It is Jesus who sends "another Paraclete" from the Father to be with the disciples forever in mission (14:16).
2. The Paraclete's special mission will be to teach the disciples "everything" ... that is – as Jesus amplifies – to remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26).
3. The Paraclete will in summary "bear witness to me", promises Jesus (15:26).
4. Then in the most extended discussion of the Spirit in the four gospels, Jesus teaches the church that the Paraclete will convict the world of three great Christological errors related to sin, righteousness, and judgment – failure to believe in Jesus is the great sin; failure to see that Jesus' career is the meaning of righteousness, is the great error; and failure to see that his work defeated the evil one is the great oversight (16:8-11).
5. The Paraclete will guide the Church "into all the truth" – not in independence, for, Jesus adds, the Spirit "will not speak on its own, but whatever it will hear [through the Son from the Father] it will say" (16:13).
6. The Paraclete, says Jesus in global summary, "will glorify me, because the Spirit will take what is mine and explain it to you" (16:14).
7. The Holy Spirit, Jesus concludes, will teach the Christocentric truth that, in turn, teaches God, for, as Jesus concludes, when Jesus is talking about "what is mine", he is actually taking about what is God's: "Absolutely everything the Father has is mine, and that is why I could say to you that the Spirit will take what is mine and explain it to you" (16:15) (Bruner, 1998:106).

The full implication of the Spirit's relationship to the Son is Soteriology. The Spirit who has a common NTU with both the Father and the Son applies to man forgiveness and renewal, viz. justification and sanctification on the basis of Christ's finished work. In the words of Berkhof:

> ... the Spirit performs a twofold work in man. The first thing needed is that we know ourselves as unconditionally invited and accepted. We have to give up our distrust, our pride, our covetousness, our holding on to ourselves and start moving in the direction of our true destination. We can do that only through a radical self-condemnation which frees us from ourselves and sets us free to hear our acquittal. Going against our self-sufficiency, we must learn to seek our salvation outside ourselves, in the man who with his obedience stands in our place before God.
> But this one man who stands in our place is at the same time the firstfruits of a renewed humanity. The Spirit takes us entirely as we are. But then he does not leave us as we are. We must begin to resemble the new man, we need to be transformed after his image (Berkhof, 1979: 327).

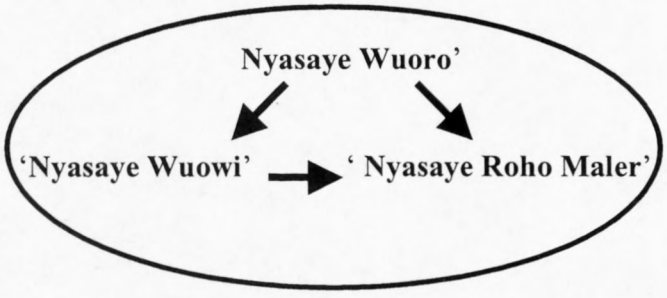
The Holy Spirit sets us free from ourselves, neighbours, and other categories of existence that fall under UMUNTU, IKINTU, AHANTU and UKUNTU because he himself is ontologically superior to these categories. Understanding the nature of freedom we have in the Holy Spirit is important because the African Christians continue to grope for protection against fears of invisible forces. As Semporè has observed

> One can regret the irrational and sometimes delirious character of certain beliefs in spirits. One can deplore the credulity of the rowds and the infatuation for magical formulas and 'miraculous' objects of protection. One must condemn the cruelty of certain repressive practices towards designated 'sorcerers'. But one can neither ignore nor neglect the reality of this need for protection engraved in the minds (Semporè, 1994:42).

The Holy Spirit frees us to conform to the image of the Son who is the true manifestation of the Father because the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son and of the Father. Existences that fall under UMUNTU, IKINTU, AHANTU and UKUNTU can only decrease or increase one's vital force but they are powerless in as far as freeing and conforming men to the image of God is concerned. Only the 'Great Muntu' can in absolute way free men from UMUNTU, IKINTU, AHANTU or UKUNTU and orient the freed men to the 'Great Muntu' himself. Since the Holy Spirit does this biune work, he must be the 'Great Muntu'. Again it should be noted that the Holy Spirit does not always have his way in us. We often resist and even cause him grief.

10.6. Conclusion

The doctrine of God in the African theology has remained at the level of the African concepts of God for way too long. This chapter has suggested that the doctrine of God in the African theology must remain biblical, but at the same time it must be explained to the Africans by using the intellectual tools in the African heritage. We therefore cannot just talk of the Christian understanding of God as Nyame, Leza, Nyambe, Modimo, Nyasaye and so on. If we are to understand Nyasaye (my mother tongue word for God) in the Christian context, then, as we have indicated elsewhere, we have to Christianise the concept of Nyasaye and begin to talk of 'Nyasaye Wuoro' (God the Father), 'Nyasaye Wuowi' (God the Son) and 'Nyasaye Roho Maler' (God the Holy Spirit). Our picture of God will have to go through modifications and it will look like this:



But Christianising the African concepts of God is not enough. A Christianised African concept that is not explained to the African audiences using African metaphysics can look strange and confusing. Once we Christianise the African concept of God, it is important that we also explain the new nuance using intellectual tools native to the situation of reception.

11. Fostering the view of God as 'Great Muntu' Manifested by the Son and the Holy Spirit

11.1. Introduction

This chapter raises a fundamental practical problem. It is one thing to propose a line of thought, but it is quite another thing to promote a new thought. One of the basic problems of theology in the context of Africa is that we never really get to recognise the ground that is already captured. Kwesi Dickson once noted that

> ... the present stagnation [of theology] may be accounted for by reference to the fact that recent discussants often seem to be unaware of past discussions on the subject. Again and again contributions made at conferences have not been such as to build upon the insights which have already been gained into the subject (Dickson, 1984:8).

Of course the neglect of captured ground can be explained by the intensity and speed of change both at the level of the continent and globally. The other realities that can explain this difficulty are the historical, the practical, the political, the ecclesiastical and the geographical reasons which have forced the theologies to be done in what Maluleke calls "isolated camps" (Maluleke, 1997: 5). One of the ways of removing the problem of the neglect of the captured ground is isolating what has already been done and promoting it.

11.2. Reasons for Promoting the view of God as the 'Great Muntu' manifested by the Son and the Holy Spirit

About four reasons can explain why we need to promote this paradigm of understanding the doctrine of God within the African theological situation. The first reason is the need for African Christians to know that the Christian faith understands God in Trinitarian terms. According the Christian faith, God is the Father made known by the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is unfortunate that as a general rule, the Christian theologies view God "... as an abstract unity for reams of pages - the existence of God, the nature of God, the attributes of God - before finally arriving at a (sometimes brief) consideration of the fact that this God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Needham, 1997: 161). This situation is

contrary to the position of the Church as it is reflected in the Creeds that date from the third and fourth centuries. In the Creeds, God is clearly named as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The African Christians need to know this fact and not be content with either the Christian theologies that view God as a monad or with the traditional African concepts of God.

But our interest is not merely to promote the doctrine of the Trinity. The African theological situation needs a Trinitarian perspective that is both biblical[169] and relevant. Part 2 of this research indicated in clear terms that the Western theologies have all along articulated theologies from perspectives that are authentically Western. A reading of Western theologies indicates that the West has never lost the intellectual heritage of Western antiquity. The questions for African inculturation theology are: Could we emulate the achievements of Western Christian scholarship at least on the issue of relevance? Is it possible to constructively reject the notion that the colour black is a symbol of mediocrity, parasitism and sterility? Throughout the centuries, the West has involved itself in the formulation and the promotion of its own theologies. The Christian scholarship in the African context can make full use of African strengths to formulate theology that is appropriate for the African context. Are the African theologians willing to engage in such a task?

The third reason for promoting a doctrine of the Trinity formulated from the point of view of the African is the significance of the African Christianity to the global Church. Already, Christianity is a major influence in Africa and it clearly is part of the heritage of contemporary Africa.[170] The statistics of David Barrett indicate that by the year 2000,

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[169] It is important to note that the African theology has always respected the Bible. Mbiti once declared that "any viable theology must and should have a biblical basis" (Mbiti, 1970: 90). Fashole-Luke is of the opinion that "the Bible is the basic and primary source for the development of African theology" (Fashole-Luke, 1976: 141).

[170] Whereas Mbiti believes that Christianity, Islam and the African traditional religions will continue to dominate Africa (Mbiti, 1969: 262), AA Mazrui sees the three religions as a significant part of what properly constitutes the contemporary African heritage (Mazrui, 1986). The true significance of Mazrui and Mbiti on the question of heritage is the fact that the African heritage can never be thought to be obsolete. There is a vast literature which indicate that many Africans actually live at 'two levels'. The most prominent Christian sources on this problem are SG Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian faith*, Accra, 1965; KA Busia, *Report on a Social Survey—Secondi-Takoradi*, London, 1950; KA Busia, *Africa in*

Africa should be largely Christian. Mbiti interprets Barrett's statistics of the Christian population in Africa today as amounting to about 370, million or 48.8% of the continent's population of 758 million (Mbiti, 1999:1). In 1956, Roland Oliver noted the geometric progression of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1912 (Oliver, 1965: 8) (see appendix three). It is therefore not surprising that AF Walls should believe that, in our own time, there has been a complete change in the center of gravity of Christianity from Europe and North America to Africa (Walls, 1976: 180). This change of gravity also means that the theology of the twenty-first century may well "depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim" (Walls, 1976: 183). But "what has happened in the minds of African Christians" cannot just remain in books and within reach of isolated camps; the proposals should be thorough, interesting and public enough to warrant wider investigation. How can we contribute to the global theological situation when we ourselves are still wallowing in imported theology?

The fourth reason has to do with the need to urge the African Church to be engaged in theological reflection. In a sense, the theologies that the Africans have written have not yet found their way to the roots of the Church. Whereas Barrett and Walls have shown us the potential of theology in the African scene, Eugene Hillman and George Kinoti have powerfully described the situation as it is on the ground. According to Hillman, "inspite of the rhetoric of incarnation, inculturation, indigenisation, and contextualisation, the general scene is characterised by little more than literal translations, cautious adaptations and questionable substitutions. Full-blooded incarnations of Christianity, if they exist anywhere in Africa, are well hidden" (Hillman, 1993:10f; see also p 38). Kinoti makes a similar statement:

> ... there is a sense in which Christianity in Africa is the white man's religion. The denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, the hymns we sing, the theologies which govern our beliefs and conduct, be they liberal or evangelical, are all made in the West. Most of the Christian books we read originate from the West and are usually written for Western readers. This is not to blame the

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Search of Democracy, London, 1967; K Little, 'The Mende in Sierra Leone' in *African Worlds,* ed. D Forde, London, 1963; and GM Setiloane, 'How the Traditional World-view Persists in the Christianity of Sotho-Tswana' in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Fashole-Luke, Bloomington, Ind., 1978.

> Western church: it is time to say to the African Christians to begin to think and do things for themselves (Kinoti, 1994:74,75).

These observations obviously embarrass the 370 million Christians in Africa today.[171] Dick France clearly agrees with Hillman and Kinoti when he suggests that the African church "needs more teaching and direction from within, not from without. It needs theology, its own African theology. Until this is achieved, ... [theology] will not grow in influence on the new Africa, and it will be increasingly dismissed as a legacy from the colonial past" (France quoted in Adeyemo, 1995: 5). Who will think for us if we are not taking up the challenge to think and formulate theological responses to our questions ourselves?

African Christianity no doubt needs to think and do things for herself if the prediction of Walls is to be a reality.[172] What France proposes here for the African Christians is not just the need to think, but the need to think critically; a kind of thinking that is willing to use the African intellectual resources to serve theology. Critical reflection for the African Christian scholarship will mean that we can no longer take for granted our own metaphysics. We can then engage such cognitive skills as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation from our own conceptual frameworks.[173] The West does this in their theology, why not us? It should be noted, however, that these are not skills that one comes to have simply by instinct. They come as a result of intensive study, long reflection, persistence, and interest. The African Christian thinkers must be willing to apply these virtues to their tasks if they are to foster their own

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[171] See appendix three on the population of Christians in Africa. However, it is important to note as CG Baeta had recognised in 1968, that "the figures derived from official church sources, represent far less than the actual numbers of professing Christians" (*Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, 1968: xii).

[172] How does the missionary or the expatriate fit into this scheme of things? The missionaries and the expatriates are part of the universal Christian community whose role in working out local theologies should be that of removing " . . . obstacles in the way of the Spirit, and to share its own experience, light and judgment" (Luzbetak, 1988:70). In this way, the missionaries, the outside experts, and the entire Universal Christian community still have an important part to play; the task of bringing to local theology an "outside" experience which is crucial if the theology is to be saved " . . . of turning in on itself, becoming self-satisfied with its own achievements" (Schreiter, 1985:19).

[173] See Facione, P (1989) for detailed analysis of the characterization of the cognitive skills involved in critical thinking.

theological proposals and to offer valuable contributions to the global theological situation.

11.3. The Method of Fostering the Proposed view of God

11.3.1. Search for an appropriate model

The American Catholic theologian David Tracy talks of the 'publics' of theology. His position is that there are three publics of theology—the university, the believing community and the public arena (Tracy, 1981:5). The task of theology and therefore of how theology may be fostered in each of these publics differs significantly. If theology has not understood its own public, there is most likely going to be "internal confusion and external chaos" (Tracy, 1981: 3). Fostering Trinitarianism within the African theological situation should therefore occur within each of these three publics (the academy, the church, and the community).

It seems, however, that in order to promote the proposed doctrine of God in these publics; we have to devise a model that is equal to the task. In the context of Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance, the Africans are already being called upon to solve their own problems. This call is not just limited to the areas of economics, technology, science, arts and politics. Mbeki's immediate interest is obviously in the area of politics; however, the call touches all areas of the African existence, including the area of intellectual development. As Mbeki explains:

> In a world in which the generation of new knowledge and its application to change the human condition is the engine which moves the human society further and further away from barbarism, do we not need to recall Africa's hundreds of thousands of intellectuals back from their places of immigration in Western Europe and North America, to rejoin those who remain still within our shore?
>
> I dream of a day when these, the African mathematicians and computer specialists in Washington and New York, the African physicists, engineers, doctors, business managers and economists will return from London and Manchester and Paris and Brussels to add to the African pool of brain power, to inquire into and find solutions to Africa's problems and challenges, to open the African door to the

world of knowledge, to elevate Africa's place within the universe of research, the formation of new knowledge, education and information.

> Africa's renewal demands that her intelligentsia must immerse itself in the titanic and all - round struggle to end poverty, ignorance, disease, and backwardness inspired by the fact that the Africans of Egypt were, in some instances two thousand years ahead of European Greece in the mastery of such subjects as geometry, trigonometry, algebra and chemistry (Mbeki, 1998).

Theology, and especially how we understand God, is obviously one of the areas upon which this call bears significantly. We must move our understanding of God beyond the mere cultural identity debate, and start to view our Christian understanding of God as part of theology's effort to address Africa's intellectual culture, but also as a task which avails Africa's constructive contributions to the global theological situation. The challenge then is: How do we formulate the doctrine of God in a way that it takes cognizance of the African metaphysics as well as of the questions of Africa, while at the same time contributing to theological knowledge at the global level? Are there well-established and credible methods? Creativity researchers seem to agree on the interactive model. This model of reflection focuses on creativity, critical thinking and application. These are very important qualities when it comes to formulating, nurturing and disseminating thoughts.

11.3.2. The Interactive Model

A recent investigation of the elements of the interactive model (Busse & Mansfield, 1980:132; Mansfield & Busse, 1981) has led to the conclusion that in order to concretely address a problem one has to go through a series of steps similar to those recommended by Rossman (1931), Wallas (1926) and Dewey (1910). The table below is a summary of the steps in the interactive model as envisioned by these three creativity researchers.

Rossman(1931) Invention	Wallas (1926) Creative production	Dewey (1910) Problem solving
1. Need or difficulty observed	1.Preparation (problem stated; information obtained; attitude set toward appropriate solution)	1. A felt difficulty (problem found)

2. Analysis; problem defined	2. Incubation (unconscious generation of potential solutions)	2. Definition and location of difficulty (problem formulated)
3. Information surveyed; possible occurrence of incubation	3.Illumination ("Eureka!" or "Aha!"- idea emerges from subconscious)	3. Suggestion of possible solution(s)
4.Many possible solutions formulated	4. Verification (evaluation of solution)	4. Development of implications of solution(s) through reasoning.
5. Critical evaluation of solutions; sustained and ongoing incubation, particularly in complex problems		5.Experimental corroboration of conjectural solution
6. Formulation of new ideas, "inventions" and solutions		
7.Evaluation and refinement of most promising solution; acceptance of final solution		

(See Brown, 1989: 6)

The five steps below take important elements not only from Rossman (1931), Wallas (1926) and Dewey (1910), whose inputs are summarised in the table above, but they also take elements from Osborne and Guilford[174]. According to the summaries of Annis (1989) and Brown (1989), the five steps of the problem finding/ problem solving model involve (1) recognising or selecting the problem, (2) clarifying and representing the elements of the problem as an extended effort to solving it, (3) proposing solutions to the problem or setting constraints on existing solutions to the problem, (4) testing and evaluating or restructuring the solutions and (5) revising, restating, and re-evaluation or simply verification and elaboration (Annis, 1998:96-99; see also Brown,1989:5).

[174] See Dacey's summary of problem solving according to Wallas, Dewey, Osborne, and Guilford.

11.3.3. Promoting the Proposed doctrine of God

The steps suggested above are based on the view that at the end of the day, theology is a problem-finding/problem-solving undertaking. This is consonant with Saint Anselm's definition of theology as *fides quarens intellectum*. In the recent past, Professor Daniel Migliore resuscitated this line of thought in his book *Faith Seeking Understanding* (1991)[175]. It is not possible to adequately understand the meaning of faith without engaging problem-finding and problem-solving mechanisms. In order for me to understand what my faith[176] means to me, I must be willing to have and exercise certain attitudes and sets of skills that have been summarised in the twin phenomena of creativity and critical thinking by problem-finding and problem-solving researchers.

The problem-finding/problem-solving approach as a way of promoting the doctrine of God is not only relevant given the situation of modern Africa[177] and the complex cultural heritage which provides the matrix within which Africa's concepts of God are embedded, it is also appropriate because it is the emerging paradigm for understanding issues that require an enormous amount of creativity and critical thinking.[178] The doctrine of God we

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[175] Prof DJ Louw, however, believes that since theology is science of interpretation and understanding, it cannot fully be captured by the concept of *fides quarens intellectum*. For Louw, theology has a threefold description: *fides quarens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding of God which is linked to our human quest for meaning), *fides quarens verbum* (faith seeking different ways of communication and conversing in order to foster the discourse and encounter between God, mankind and creation) and *fides quarens actum* (faith seeking different ways of doing the will of God so as to relate the church to our quest for meaning) (Louw, 1998:105f).

[176] As Cantwell Smith has explained, faith at the end of the day is truly personal: 'My faith is an act that I make myself, naked before God' (Smith, *The Meaning and end of Religion*, London, 1978: 1991).

[177] See Kinoti G chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of the modern problems of Africa. See also Cochrane JR on the modern public issues facing Africa.

[178] Creativity and critical thinking are related. In order to be creative one has to have the skill of critical thinking. Both creativity and critical thinking require the application of the right attitude as well as such largely accepted cognitive skills as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation (Annis, 1998: 98). Creativity researchers have found that these skills are applied through at least five steps; none of which is adequate in and of itself and all of them are necessary. The steps are: (1) recognising or selecting the problem, (2) clarifying and representing the elements of the problem as an extended effort to solving it, (3) proposing solutions to the problem, (4) testing and evaluating or restructuring the solutions, and (5) revising, restating, and re-evaluation or simply verification and

hold and teach must not only be biblical and relevant, it must also show that some critical thinking and creativity has gone into it[179üü]. The steps below are adopted from the summaries of Annis (1998), Brown (1989), Rossman ((1931), Wallas (1926) and Dewey (1910) and reworked to suit our purpose.

11.3.3.1. Step One: Abstract an Account of the doctrine of the Trinity

In order to abstract an account of the doctrine of the Trinity, one has to have large and fluent knowledge of the Christian doctrine of God. Consequently, one must not only be in a position to identify the problem areas within the doctrine and deal with the inadequate explanations currently offered within the Christian theological circles, but he/she must also be willing to offer a well-considered explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is where a keen understanding of the historical debates, as well as a good grasp of significant theologians of the Church, is crucial.

We in the African theology must therefore seek to understand what the Bible means by emphasising one God, while at the same time teaching the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We have to search for ourselves how the Church Fathers understood God when they formulated the Creeds which have come down to us. The Creeds have had reinterpretations in different directions by scholars and faith communities. We cannot bypass these efforts in our own search for a reinterpretation that is appropriate for the African context. If we are going to engage in informed theological discourses with the wider theological fraternity, we cannot afford to short-circuit the contributions to the Trinitarian debate by individual theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth and so on. To listen to what these theologians say is to function within a universal Christian

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elaboration (see Annis, 1998: 96-99; Brown, 1989: 5f.)

[179] Note that many 'Creativity' researchers have the view that creativity itself is a special case of problem solving. With creativity one arrives at a novel and a valuable solution to a problem. For example, see Newell, Shaw and Simon. Creativity, explains Annis, " . . . involves a complex interaction of various (a) cognitive competencies, traits, processes, and activities, and (b) personality, attitudinal, and motivational traits. Various "environmental" conditions, such as developmental experiences in the family and school as well as in the social and the historical context, also play and important role. Within the cognitive category, creativity requires the development and effective use of a large and a fluid knowledge base, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and metacognitive skills"(Annis, 1998:96).

story. To function within the universal Christian story, or as Vincent of Lerins emphasized, 'what has been believed everywhere, always and by all' (*Commonitorium* II, 1-3) is not to fall into Eurocentric formation. The African church is part of the universal Church; it does not have another story. It is the same universal story that the African theology must identify, listen to, and clarify for the African audience.

11.3.3.2. Step Two: Find out how this account is a problem to the African mind

Here we are basically concerned with what Annis calls "problem clarification and representation" (Annis, 1998: 97). We clarify and represent the problem by asking and providing answers to such questions as: "What are the elements of the problem? What are the relevant issues involving it? How is the problem to be represented so that it can be explored and solved?" (Annis, 1998: 97).

The doctrine of the Trinity is a problem to the African mind in at least three ways. In the first place, the doctrine comes to us clothed in either Neo-Platonism or Idealism. We see these models of interpreting reality clearly in the theological terms: 'substance' and 'persons'. As we have demonstrated in this research, the African people do not think in either Neo-Platonic or Idealistic terms. They do not understand the theological concepts 'substance' and 'persons' in the terms of either the Neo-Platonists or the Idealists. The conceptual framework of the African peoples is best captured by the NTU concept and as we have already seen, the NTU metaphysics has its own way of understanding 'substance' or 'being' and 'person'. How are we to reinterpret the doctrine of the Trinity for a people whose way of understanding 'being' or 'substance' and 'person' is so different?

Then there is the theological problem raised by the three persons. As we have indicated in the previous sections, the African cosmology does not allow the African to think in Trinitarian terms. For him God is one, and no one else shares the divine category with him. How do we instill in our people the view that God has made himself known in the Son and the Holy Spirit? How do we help the African Christians to understand that the

Son and the Holy Spirit are not just manifestation of the Father in the sense in which the sun and the moon, for example, are manifestations of Nyasaye? (see Kirwen, 1987:5) How do we help the African Christians to know that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not similar to the African teaching about God creating lesser beings who are godlike and have God's powers, but who are subject to God? In other words, how do we teach the theological concept of 'three Persons in one God' to a people whose nomenclature does not seem to allow for plurality in God?

Besides the problem of the 'one and the many' in the God language of the Christian faith, there is also the problem of God-man. Kirwen has captured the difficulty this causes for the God language in the traditional African setting.

> ... Kiteme is so different from humanity that it is impossible for humanity to be joined with God in one life as you teach. How can God be part of his own creation? Do not your teachings about Jesus Christ dilute the true nature of God by bringing God physically into the world of humanity? Are you trying to say that God was also a human being who was born, ate, slept, suffered, got sick, and died? But what is your point? What does this add to your understanding of God? And to interpret the cruel, inhuman death of Jesus as a sign of God's love makes a mockery of God. Indeed, Jesus' death on the cross reinforces our belief that evil is within the human community and that God has nothing to do with evil. Jesus' death could only be the result of the evil wills of other persons, wills that would not have had any power over God if Jesus were truly God (Kirwen, 1987:16).

The questions that the God language in the African context raise for the Christian view of God-man have been clearly captured by the excerpt above. How do we deal with these questions?

And then there is the problem of the suitability of African terms for the theological enterprise. Are there African terms that can convey the deep theological issues encapsulated in the traditional Trinitarian formula? Of course, as Lamin D Sanneh says, the Gospel truth can be expressed in the conceptual forms of every culture (Sanneh, 1989). Kwame Bediako also argues strongly for the significance of the capacity to transpose the Christian message from its biblical matrix into the categories of understanding available in the indigenous cultures (Bediako, 1992:426-441). As we have demonstrated, there is no doubt that the doctrine of the Trinity can be expressed for

Africans using the African metaphysics. But are we willing to search and locate the necessary intellectual tools and symbols for this task within our conceptual framework? Will the tools and symbols gain acceptance among us and within the global theological situation? In other words, are we willing to be different and will the global theological fraternity accept the fact that we are different? Put in another way: Will the African tools and symbols gain recognition and respect within the global theological situation?

11.3.3.3. Step Three: Propose solution(s) to the problem(s)

The solutions proposed depend to a great extent on the nature of the problems identified by the research. In step two above we noted four problems that the account of the doctrine of the Trinity pose to the African God language. In a sense this whole dissertation is an attempt to address these problems. We have, for example, proposed the following solutions:

1) The African God language as replacement for the Neo-Platonic and Idealistic nomenclatures. Theology should be willing to do research into and make use of the infrastructure of the African metaphysics to express the truth. This is important because peoples' way of speaking about reality around them is hidden in their cultures and, as Mbiti once said:

> Without culture, the Gospel can not encounter people. Yet, by its very nature, even though expressed and communicated within the limits of culture, the Gospel is itself beyond culture. The beyondness of the Gospel derives from the fact that God is the author of the Gospel while man is the author of culture. Culture makes us very earthly and human, the Gospel makes us very heavenly and divine. It is not culture, but the Gospel, which has the final say over us as human beings. Yet the Gospel makes us new people in Christ within the framework of our culture and not apart from it. For that reason, the Gospel and culture are not mutually contradictory or in conflict - since man (and not culture) is the sinner and the Gospel changes man whatever culture makes him to be. ... If we take it that the Gospel is intended for the whole man in the whole world (*oikumene*) and creation ... then the church must take African culture seriously. In the book of Revelation, the final picture of the new creation is one in which, among other things, the people of the whole world, bring into the holy city, the new Jerusalem, "the glory and the honour of the nations" (Rev.21). I believe that Africa is spiritually capable of bringing its contribution of glory, to the city of God, through the elements of

our religiosity and culture - healed, saved, purified and sanctified by the by the Gospel (Mbiti, 1978: 281).

2) Description of *homousios* using the NTU concept. According to the African cosmology there is only one 'Great Muntu'. According to the Christian faith, the 'Great Muntu' has a common NTU with the Son and the Holy Spirit. What the African understands by 'being' and 'person' cannot be short-circuited in a task which seeks to transpose the traditional meaning of the Trinity onto the African cultural milieu. Using the African metaphysics rather than Neo-Platonism or Hegelianism to describe the standard Trinitarian formula of 'One Substance Three Persons' means that we are to reflect on the African metaphysics of God, substance and person. In the African thought, one God is not a static substance or nature described by the concept of NTU, rather the concept of One God refers to the 'Great Muntu'. The African ontology knows of only one 'Great Muntu'. To say that the 'Great Muntu' has made himself known in three Persons is to say that the Son and the Holy Spirit are perfect reflections of the 'Great Muntu' and that the three exist in community. Each of these persons is a perfect reflection of the 'Great Muntu' because each has a 'genuine Muntu' that is not merely a tributary of the 'Great Muntu' but a 'genuine Muntu' that is the 'Great Muntu' himself.
3) Approach theology from the point of view of *fides quarens intellectum.* This approach allows me to address the issues of the God-man. The traditional African God language does not accept the doctrine of the incarnation. But, as an African Christian, I have the right to use the intellectual resources of my culture to understand and communicate what the Christian faith means by God-man. In his life on earth, the Son fully manifested the 'Great Muntu'. He therefore must be the 'Great Muntu' himself, since only God can fully manifest the 'Great Muntu'.
4) It is not in our power to predict the nature of the response that these proposals are likely to generate. At the moment these proposals are tentative, although we can hold them with integrity.

11.3.3.4. Step Four: Test and Evaluate the solution(s)

This step assumes that we have a personal faith that we hold so dearly, that we understand the doctrine in question well and that we have made full advantage of the reflections of the Universal Church. Also important for this step is our grasp of the African concepts of God and the way the African metaphysics works. The questions that are useful here are: Are the solutions in step three above consistent with the Christian tradition? Do they have systematic potential? Are they capable of addressing the challenges in the African context? Can I hold the solutions with personal integrity?

11.3.3.5. Step Five: Revise, restate, and re-evaluate

This stage reminds us of the tentative nature of theology. Although I have suggested solutions to the problems of Trinitarianism in the African context, and although I can hold the proposals with integrity for the time being, I am aware that the proposals must remain tentative. This is an in-built structure within this model which ensures that we make constant adjustments to the solution(s) we propose in the light of new findings. This is possible only as we go through the five steps of the interactive model again and again.

11.4. Conclusion

Whereas Trinitarianism needs to take root in the African academy, an effort should be made to ensure that the believing community gets focused attention in this regard as well. The African Christian interacts with his environment and social setting in many complex ways. In all these interactions it is still true, as Placide Tempels once said, that Africans lives more by 'Being' than by following their own ideas (Tempels, 1959:23). Mbiti in a way corroborated Tempels when he said that the African is incurably religious. Religion, Mbiti explains, "permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it" (Mbiti, 1969:1; 262). The other African scholars who think in these terms are JB Danquah and Bolaji Idowu. Danquah and Louw argue that religion and especially the concept of God, significantly influence peoples' moral attitude (Danquah, 1968:2; 3; 16; cf Louw, 1998:328-349). Idowu indicates that Africans do not

make an attempt to separate morality and religion "and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences" (Idowu, 1962:145; 146).

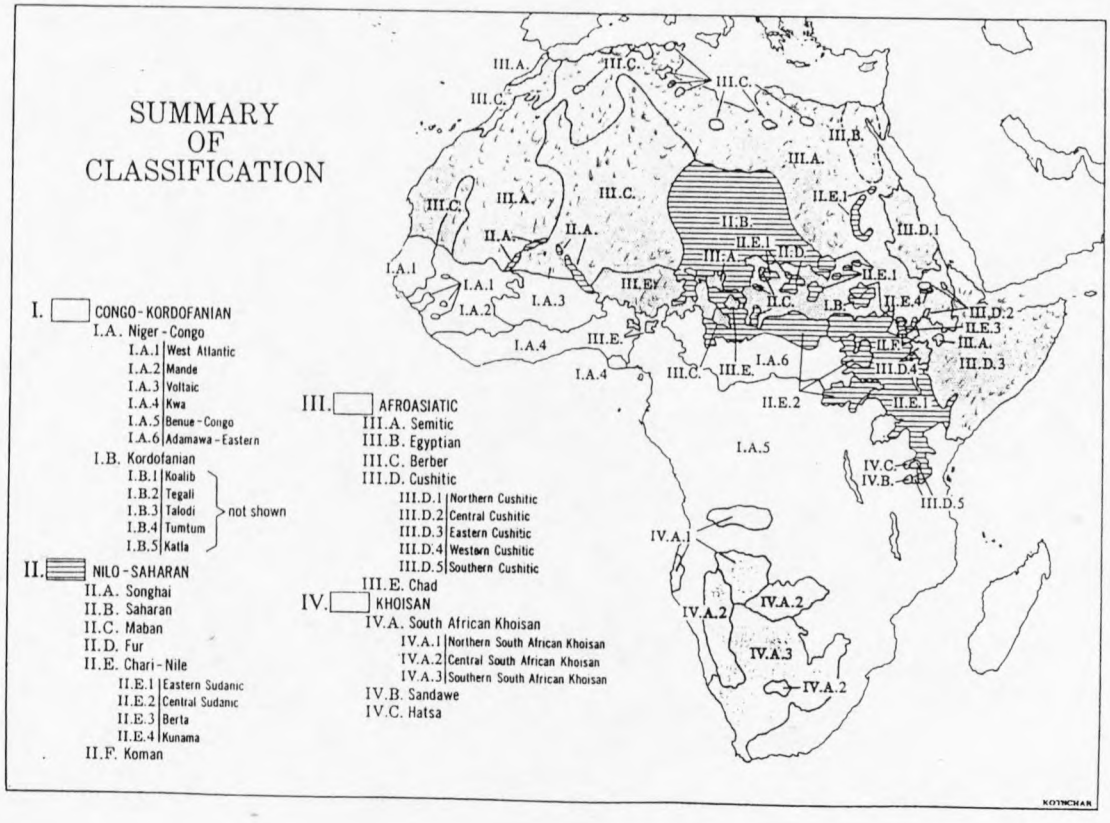
It is therefore important for the Christian faith to know that the concept of God significantly influences the choices people make. In the traditional Africa, how people relate to the spirit world, to the ancestors, to the others in the community, to the animal world, and to the inanimate zone links significantly with how they understand God. The African Christian must therefore not understand the Christian view of God only superficially. The mistake of understanding the Christian view of God superficially leads to a situation in which the African Christian does not know what to do with the African traditional past, his environment, the community, and other religions on the scene. We guard against a superficial understanding of God by fully Christianising the African concepts of God, by inculturating the Christian understanding of God, and by encouraging our academies and churches to be involved in the gigantic task of thinking creatively and critically about the Christian view of God.

• Appendix One: A Genetic Classification of the African Peoples and their Languages

This data is available in the book, *Languages of Africa* by Joseph H Greenberg (1963:163-171, 177). In order to arrive at this classification, Greenberg was guided by the following research principles:

1. The sole relevance in comparison of resemblances involving sound and meaning.
2. Mass comparison of languages.
3. The sole significance of linguistic evidence in drawing conclusions about classifications.

Building upon the studies of Greenberg and others, individual contemporary ethnolinguistics and African historiographers such as P Diagne, D Olderogge, and J Ki-Zerbo, as well as institutions such as the Africa Institute of South African (AISA), have strongly argued for the genetic and the cultural unity of the African blacks. In Part Three of this research, we referred to different African peoples and their respective names for or understanding of God. This appendix helps us to see the internal relationship of the African peoples and their languages. Seeing this relationship is crucial, since we intend to operate within the view that the African peoples have a common conceptual framework.



1. Abe I. A. 4; A-F7
2. Abine I. A. 5; B-F4
3. Abua I. A. 5; B-F3
4. Abure I. A. 4; A-G8
5. Acholi II. E. 1; C-F3
6. Adangme I. A. 4; A-G10
7. Adele I. A. 4; A-E10
8. Adyukru I. A. 4; A-G7
9. Afar III. D. 3; D-C7
10. Afawa III. E; B-C4
11. Afitti II. E. 1; D-C6
12. Affade III. E; B-B7
13. Afo I. A. 5; B-D3
14. Afusare I. A. 5; B-D4
15. Agatu I. A. 4; B-E3
16. Ahlõ I. A. 4; A-F10
17. Akan I. A. 4; (see individual languages)
18. Akoiyang I. A. 5; B-F4
19. Akpafu I. A. 4; A-F10
20. Akposo I. A. 4; A-F10
21. Akunakuna I. A. 5; B-F4
22. Akye I. A. 4; A-F, G8
23. Aladian I. A. 4; A-G7
24. Alaba III. D. 3; C-E5
25. Alawa III. D. 5; (see 695)
26. Alur II. E. 1; C-F2
27. Amadi I. A. 6; (see 446)
28. Amap I. A. 5; B-C4
29. Amar III. D. 4; C-E5
30. Amharic III. A; C-B6
31. Anaguta I. A. 5; B-D4
32. Andoni I. A. 5; B-F3
33. Anfillo III. D. 4; C-C4
34. Angas III. E; B-D4
35. Ankwe III. E; B-D4
36. Anuak II. E. 1; C-C, D3
37. Anyi I. A. 4; A-F8
38. Anyimere I. A. 4; A-E10
39. Arabic III. A; (not entered)
40. Arbore III. D. 3; C-E5
41. Argobba III. A; C-C6
42. Ari I. A. 4; A-G7
43. Asiga I. A. 5; B-F4
44. Asua II. E. 2; D-D5
45. Aten I. A. 5; B-D4
46. Auen IV. A. 1; D-G5
47. Auni IV. A. 3; D-G5
48. Auyokawa III. E; B-B5
49. Avatime I. A. 4; A-F9, 10
50. Avikam I. A. 4; A-G7
51. Avukaya II. E. 2; C-E2
52. Awiya III. D. 2; C-B5
53. Awuna I. A. 3; A-D8
54. Ayu I. A. 5; B-D4
55. Bachama III. E; B-D5
56. Baditu III. D. 4; C-E5
57. Badyara I. A. 1; A-C3
58. Baga I. A. 1; A-D2
59. Bagirmi II. E. 2; B-C8
60. Bai I. A. 6; D-D5
61. Baka II. E. 2; C-E1
62. Bako III. D. 4; C-D, E5
63. Bakwe I. A. 4; A-G6
64. Balante I. A. 1; A-C2
65. Balda III. E; B-C6
66. Bamanga I. A. 6; (see 476)
67. Bambara I. A. 2; A-C6
68. Bana III. D. 4; (see 62)
69. Bana III. E; (see 469)
70. Banana III. E; B-D8
71. Banda I. A. 6; D-D5
72. Bangba I. A. 6; D-D5
73. Bantu I. A. 5; (not entered)
74. Banyun I. A. 1; A-C1
75. Barambo I. A. 6; D-D5
76. Barawa III. E; B-C, D4
77. Barea II. E. 1; D-C6
78. Barein III. E; B-C9
79. Bargu I. A. 3; (see 81)
80. Bari II. E. 1; C-E2
81. Bariba I. A. 3; B-C1
82. Basa I. A. 5; B-E3
83. Basari I. A. 1; A-C3
84. Basari I. A. 3; (see 675)
85. Bashetawa I. A. 5; B-D5
86. Basketo III. D. 4; C-E5
87. Bassa I. A. 4; A-F5
88. Bata III. E; B-D6
89. Batu I. A. 5; B-E5
90. Batwa IV. A. 3; D-G6
91. Baule I. A. 4; A-F7
92. Baygo II. E. 1; D-C5
93. Baza III. E; (see 211)
94. Bedanga III. E; (see 626)
95. Bedauye III. D. 1; D-C6
96. Bede III. E; B-B5
97. Beir II. E. 1; C-E3
98. Beja III. D. 1; (see 95)
99. Beli II. E. 2; C-D1
100. Benesho III. D. 4; C-D4
101. Berber III. C; (not entered)
102. Berta II. E. 3; C-B4
103. Berti II. B; D-C5
104. Bete I. A. 4; A-F6
105. Biafada I. A. 1; A-D2
106. Bidyogo I. A. 1; A-D1
107. Bilin III. D. 2; (see 115)
108. Binga II. E. 2; D-D5
109. Bini I. A. 4; B-E2
110. Birifor I. A. 3; A-D8
111. Birked II. E. 1; D-C5
112. Birom I. A. 5; B-D4
113. Bisa I. A. 2; A-D9
114. Bitare I. A. 5; B-E5
115. Bogo III. D. 2; D-C6

116. Boki I. A. 5; B-E4
117. Bolewa III. E; B-C5
118. Bongo II. E. 2; D-D5
119. Bor II. E. 1; C-D2
120. Boritsu I. A. 5; B-D5
121. Bowili I. A. 4; A-F10
122. Bua I. A. 6; B-C8
123. Bubalia II. E. 2; B-B7
124. Buduma III. E; B-A7
125. Buji I. A. 5; B-C4
126. Bulea I. A. 3; (see 342)
127. Bulom I. A. 1; A-E3
128. Bura III. E; B-C6
129. Burji III. D. 3; C-E5
130. Burun II. E. 1; C-B4
131. Burungi III. D. 5; D-E6
132. Busa I. A. 2; B-C2
133. Butawa I. A. 5; C-C4
134. Bute I. A. 5; B-F6
135. Bviri I. A. 6; D-D5
136. Bwaka I. A. 6; D-D4
137. Bwamu I. A. 3; A-D8
138. Bwol III. E; B-D4
139. Cassanga I. A. 1; A-C1, 2
140. Chala I. A. 3; A-F10
141. Cham I. A. 6; B-D5
[142. Cham III. E; B-D5 (omit)]
143. Chamba I. A. 3; (see 350)
144. Chamba I. A. 6; B-D5
145. Chara III. D. 4; C-D5
146. Chawai I. A. 5; B-D4
147. Cheke III. E; B-C6
148. Chibak III. E; B-C6
149. Chip III. E; B-D4
150. Chiri III. E; B-D8
151. Chongee III. E; B-D5
152. Cobiana I. A. 1; A-C1
153. Daba III. E; B-C6
154. Dadiya I. A. 6; B-D5
155. Dagari I. A. 3; A-D8
156. Dagomba I. A. 3; A-E9
157. Dagu II. E. 1; D-C5
158. Dair II. E. 1; D-C6
159. Daka I. A. 6; B-D5
160. Dakakari I. A. 5; B-C2
161. Dama I. A. 6; B-D7
162. Damot III. D. 2; C-B5
163. Dan I. A. 2; A-F6
164. Darasa III. D. 3; C-D6
165. Daza II. B; D-C4
166. De I. A. 4; A-F4
167. Degha I. A. 3; A-E8
168. Dek I. A. 6; (see 412)
169. Delo I. A. 3; A-E10
170. Demsa III. E; B-D6
171. Dendje II. E. 2; B-D9
172. Dera III. E; (see 338)
173. Didinga II. E. 1; C-E3
174. Dilling II. E. 1; C-A1
175. Dime III. D. 4; C-D5
176. Dimuk III. E; B-D4
177. Dinka II. E. 1; C-D1
178. Diryawa III. E; B-C5
179. Disa II. E. 2; B-C9
180. Djerma II. A; A-B10
181. Dodoth II. E. 1; C-F3, 4
182. Doghosie I. A. 3; A-D8
183. Doghosie-Fing I. A. 3; (see 182)
184. Dogon I. A. 3; A-B8
185. Doko III. D. 4; C-D5
186. Dollo III. D. 4; C-D5
187. Donga I. A. 6; (see 144)
188. Dongola II. E. 1; D-C6
189. Dormo III. E; B-D8
190. Dukawa I. A. 5; B-C2
191. Durru I. A. 6; B-E6
192. Dyalonke I. A. 2; A-D4
193. Dyan I. A. 3; A-D8
194. Dyimini I. A. 3; A-E7
195. Dyola I. A. 1; A-C1
196. Dyula I. A. 2; A-D7
197. Efe II. E. 2; D-D5
198. Efik I. A. 5; B-F4
199. Eggon I. A. 5; B-D4
200. Egyptian III. B; (extinct)
201. Ekuri I. A. 5; B-F4
202. El Amira I. B. 3; C-B2
203. Eliri I. B. 3; C-B2
204. Eregba I. A. 5; (extinct)
205. Ewe I. A. 4; A-F10
206. Fadidja II. E. 1; D-B6
207. Fajulu II. E. 1; C-E2
208. Fali I. A. 6; B-D6
209. Fali of Jilbu III. E; (see 211)
210. Fali of Kiria III. E; B-C6
211. Fali of Mubi III. E; B-C6
212. Fazoglo II. E. 3; (see 102)
213. Feroge I. A. 6; (see 541)
214. Fiome III. D. 5; (see 258)
215. Foro I. A. 3; A-D7
216. Fulani I. A. 1; A-D3
217. Fulse I. A. 3; (see 402)
218. Fur II. D; D-C5
219. Gã I. A. 4; A-G9
220. Gabere III. E; B-D8
221. Gabin III. E; B-C6
222. Gade I. A. 4; B-D3
223. Galla III. D. 3; C-C5
224. Gamba II. E. 2; B-D8

225. Gamergu III. E; B-C6
226. Gan I. A. 3; A-F7
227. Ganawuri I. A. 5; (see 45)
228. Ganza II. F; C-C3, 4
229. Gao II. A; A-A10
230. Gardula III. D. 3; C-E5
231. Garko II. E. 1; D-C5
232. Garo III. D. 4; C-D5
233. Gauar III. E; B-C7
234. Gayi I. A. 5; B-E5
235. Gayi III. D. 4; C-E5
236. Gbandi I. A. 2; A-F5
237. Gbanziri I. A. 6; D-D5
238. Gbari I. A. 4; B-D2
239. Gbaya I. A. 6; B-F8
240. Gberi II. E. 2; C-D1
241. Gbunde I. A. 2; A-E4
242. Ge'ez III. A; (extinct)
243. Geleba III. D. 3; C-E5
244. Gengle I. A. 6; B-D5
245. Gerawa III. E; B-C4
246. Gerka III. E; B-D4
247. Gerumawa III. E; B-C4
248. Gezawa III. E; B-C4, 5
249. Gidder III. E; B-C7
250. Gidole III. D. 3; C-E5
251. Gimira III. D. 4; C-D4
252. Gio I. A. 2; (see 163)
253. Gisiga III. E; B-C7
254. Gofa III. D. 4; C-D, E5
255. Gola I. A. 1; A-F4
256. Golo I. A. 6; D-D5
257. Goram III. E; B-D4
258. Goroa III. D. 5; D-E6
259. Gouin I. A. 3; A-D7
260. Gowaze III. D. 3; C-E5
261. Grebo I. A. 4; A-G5
262. Guang I. A. 4; A-E9
263. Gude III. E; (see 725)
264. Gudo III. E; B-D6
265. Guerze I. A. 2; (see 385)
266. Gulai II. E. 2; B-D8
267. Gule II. F; C-B3
268. Gulei III. E; (see 189)
269. Gulfan II. E. 1; C-B2
270. Gulfei III. E; (see 383)
271. Gumuz II. F; C-B4
272. Gurage III. A; C-C6
273. Gure I. A. 5; B-C4
274. Gurma I. A. 3; A-D10
275. Guro I. A. 2; (see 407)
276. Gwa I. A. 4; A-G8
277. Gwandara III. E; B-D4
278. Hadya III. D. 3; C-C5
279. Harari III. A; D-C, D7
280. Haruro III. D. 4; C-D6
281. Hatsa IV. C; D-E6
282. Hausa III. E; B-B3
283. Heiban I. B. 1; C-B2
284. Hiechware IV. A. 2; D-F, G5
285. Hiji III. E; B-C6
286. Hina III. E; B-C6, 7
287. Hinna III. E; B-C5
288. Holma III. E; B-C, D6
289. Hona III. E; B-C6
290. Horo II. E. 2; B-D9
291. Hottentot IV. A. 2; (see 531, 379)
292. Huela I. A. 2; A-E8
293. Ibibio I. A. 5; B-F3
294. Ibo I. A. 4; B-F3
295. Idoma I. A. 4; B-E4
296. Igala I. A. 4; B-E3
297. Igbira I. A. 4; B-E3
298. Ijo I. A. 4; B-F3
299. Indri I. A. 6; (see 541)
300. Ingassana II. E. 1; C-B3, 4
301. Iraqw III. D. 5; D-E6
302. Irigwe I. A. 5; B-D4
303. Ishan I. A. 4; B-E3
304. Iyala I. A. 4; B-E4
305. Jaba I. A. 5; B-D4
306. Janjero III. D. 4; C-C, D5
307. Janji I. A. 5; (see 400)
[308. Jarawa I. A. 5; B-C4 (Bantu) (omit)]
309. Jen I. A. 6; B-D5
310. Jera III. E; B-C5, 6
311. Jie II. E. 1; C-F3, 4
312. Jimo III. E; (see 730)
313. Jórto III. E; B-D4
314. Jukun I. A. 5; B-E4
315. Jur II. E. 1; D-D5
316. Kaba II. E. 2; B-D9
317. Kaba III. D. 4; C-D4
318. Kabre I. A. 3; A-D10
319. Kachicheri I. A. 5; B-D4
320. Kadara I. A. 5; B-D3
321. Kadero II. E. 1; C-A2
322. Kadugli I. B. 4; (between 358 and 423)
323. Kafa III. D. 4; C-D5
324. Kagoro I. A. 5; B-D4
325. Kahugu I. A. 5; B-C4
326. Kaje I. A. 5; B-D4
327. Kakwa II. E. 1; C-F2

328. Kaleri I. A. 5; B-D4
329. Kam I. A. 6; B-D5
330. Kamantan I. A. 5; B-D4
331. Kambari I. A. 5; B-C2
332. Kambata III. D. 3; C-D5
333. Kamdang I. B. 4; C-B1
334. Kamir III. D. 2; D-C6
335. Kamu I. A. 6; B-D5
336. Kamuku I. A. 5; B-C3
337. Kana I. A. 5; B-F3
338. Kanakuru III. E; B-D6
339. Kanderma I. B. 1; C-B2
340. Kanembu II. B; B-B6
341. Kaninkwom I. A. 5; B-D4
342. Kanjaga I. A. 3; A-D8
343. Kanuri II. B; B-C6
344. Kapsiki III. E; B-C6
345. Kara II. E. 2; D-D5
346. Karamojong II. E. 1; C-F4
347. Karbo III. E; B-C9
348. Karekare III. E; B-C5
349. Karondi I. B. 4; C-B2
350. Kasele I. A. 3; A-E10
351. Kasena I. A. 3; A-D9
352. Katab I. A. 5; B-D4
353. Katcha I. B. 4; C-B1
354. Katla I. B. 5; C-B1
355. Kawama I. B. 1; (see 574)
356. Kayla III. D. 2; D-C6
357. Kebu I. A. 4; A-E10
358. Keiga I. B. 4; C-B1
359. Keliko II. E. 2; C-F2
360. Kemant III. D. 2; D-C6
361. Kenga II. E. 2; B-C8
362. Kentu I. A. 5; B-E5
363. Kenuzi II. E. 1; D-B6
364. Kerre III. D. 4; C-E5
365. Khamta III. D. 2; (see 334)
366. Khasonke I. A. 2; A-B4
367. ≠Khomani IV. A. 3; D-G5
368. Kilba III. E; B-C6
369. Kirifawa III. E; B-C5
370. Kissi I. A. 1; A-F4
371. Koalib I. B. 1; C-B2
372. Kobochi III. E; (see 568)
373. Koke I. A. 6; B-C8
374. Kolbila I. A. 6; B-D6
375. Koma II. F; C-C4
376. Kono I. A. 2; A-E4
377. Konso III. D. 3; C-E5
378. Konyagi I. A. 1; A-C3
379. Korana IV. A. 2; D-G5
380. Koranko I. A. 2; A-E4
381. Koro I. A. 5; B-D4
382. Korop I. A. 5; (see 569)
383. Kotoko III. E; B-C7
384. Kotopo I. A. 6; B-E5
385. Kpelle I. A. 2; A-F5
386. Kpere I. A. 6; B-F6
387. Krawi I. A. 4; A-G5
388. Kreish II. E. 2; D-D5
389. Krongo I. B. 4; C-B1
390. Kru I. A. 4; A-G5
391. Kudawa I. A. 5; B-C4
392. Kuka II. E. 2; B-B7, 8
393. Kukuruku I. A. 4; B-E3
394. Kulango I. A. 3; A-E8
395. Kulung III. E; B-D7
396. Kumba I. A. 6; B-D6
397. Kunama II. E. 4; D-C6
398. Kundugr II. E. 1; (see 321)
399. !Kung IV. A. 1; D-F4, 5
400. Kurama I. A. 5; B-C4
401. Kuri III. E; B-B7
402. Kurumba I. A. 3; A-C8
403. Kusasi I. A. 3; A-D9
404. Kurseri III. E; (see 383)
405. Kutev I. A. 5; (see 729)
406. Kutin I. A. 6; B-D6
407. Kweni I. A. 2; A-F6
408. Kwolla III. E; B-D4
409. Kyama I. A. 4; A-G7
410. Kyan I. A. 3; A-C7
411. Laka II. E. 2; B-D8
412. Lakka I. A. 6; B-D7
413. Lame III. E; B-D7
414. Landoma I. A. 1; A-D2
415. Lango II. E. 1; C-F3
416. Lafofa I. B. 3; C-B2
417. Laro I. B. 1; C-B2
418. Lefana I. A. 4; A-F10
419. Lekon I. A. 6; (see 144)
420. Lendu II. E. 2; C-G2
421. Lese II. E. 2; C-F1
422. Libo I. A. 6; B-D6
423. Ligbi I. A. 2; A-E8
424. Liguri II. E. 1; C-B1

425. Likpe I. A. 4; A-F10
426. Limba I. A. 1; A-E4
427. Lobi I. A. 3; A-D8
428. Logba I. A. 4; A-F10
429. Logo II. E. 2; C-F1, 2
430. Logone III. E; (see 383)
431. Loko I. A. 2; A-E3
432. Loma I. A. 2; A-E5
433. Lombi II. E. 2; D-D, E5
434. Longarim II. E. 1; C-E3
435. Longuda I. A. 6; B-D5
436. Lotuko II. E. 1; C-E3
437. Lugbara II. E. 2; C-F2
438. Lumun I. B. 3 (see 672)
439. Luo II. E. 1; D-E6
440. Lyele I. A. 3; A-C8
441. Ma I. A. 6; (see 446)
442. Maba II. C; D-C4, 5
443. Mada I. A. 5; B-D4
444. Madi II. E. 2; C-F2
445. Madjinngay II. E. 2; B-D9
446. Madyo I. A. 6; D-D5
447. Mahas II. E. 1; D-B6
448. Maji III. D. 4; C-D4
449. Makere II. E. 2; D-D5
450. Malabu III. E; (see 211)
451. Malinke I. A. 2; A-C4
452. Malkan II. E. 3; C-B5
453. Mambila I. A. 5; B-E5
454. Mamprusi I. A. 3; A-D9
455. Mamvu II. E. 2; D-D5
456. Mandara III. E; B-G7
457. Mandyak I. A. 1; A-C1, 2
458. Mangaya I. A. 6; B-F8
459. Mangbei I. A. 6; B-D7
460. Mangbetu II. E. 2; D-D5
461. Mangbutu II. E. 2; D-D5
462. Manja I. A. 6; D-D5
463. Mano I. A. 2; A-F5
464. Mao II. F; C-C4
465. Mao III. D. 4; (see 33)
466. Margi III. E; B-C6
467. Marille III. D. 3; (see 243)
468. Masa I. A. 6, B-C7
469. Masa III. E; B-D8
470. Masai II. E. 1; D-E6
471. Masakin I. B. 3; C-B1
472. Masarwa IV. A. 3; D-G5
473. Masongo II. E. 1; C-C, D4
474. Matakam III. E; B-C7
475. Mayogo I. A. 6; (see 72)
476. Mba I. A. 6; D-D5
477. Mbai II. E. 2; B-D8
478. Mbaka I. A. 6; (see 136)
479. Mbarike I. A. 5; (see 729)
480. Mbembe I. A. 5; B-E4
481. Mbere I. A. 6; B-E7
482. Mboi I. A. 6; B-D6
483. Mbugu III. D. 5; D-E6
484. Mbulunge III. D. 5; (see 131)
485. Mbum I. A. 6; B-F6
486. Meje II. E. 2; D-D5
487. Mekan II. E. 1; C-D4
488. Mende I. A. 2; A-F4
489. Merarit II. E. 1; D-C5
490. Metyibo I. A. 4; A-G8
491. Midob II. E. 1; D-C5
492. Miltu III. E; B-C8
493. Mimi (of Nachtigal) II. C; D-C4
494. Mimi (of Gaudefroy-Demombynes) II. C; (location not known)
495. Minianka I. A. 3; A-C7
496. Miri I. B. 4; C-B1
497. Miriam III. E; B-D4
498. Mittu II. E. 2; C-D2
499. Miyawa III. E; B-C4, 5
500. Moba I. A. 3; A-D9
501. Mober III. E; B-B6
502. Mocha III. D. 4; C-D4
503. Modgel III. E; B-D8
504. Mofu III. E; B-C7
505. Mondari II. E. 1; C-E2
506. Mondunga I. A. 6; B-G9
507. Monjombo I. A. 6; D-D4
508. Mono I. A. 6; B-D7
509. Montol III. E; B-D4
510. Moreb I. B. 2; C-A2
511. Moro I. B. 1; C-B2
512. Morokodo II. E. 2; C-E1, 2
513. Morū II. E. 2; C-E2
514. Morwa I. A. 5; B-D4
515. Mossi I. A. 3; A-C9
516. Mubi III. E; B-B9
517. Mumbake I. A. 6; (see 144)
518. Mumuye I. A. 6; B-D5
519. Mundang I. A. 6; B-D7
520. Mundu I. A. 6; C-E1, 2
521. Munga I. A. 6; (see 309)

522. Murle II. E. 1; C-E5
523. Murzu II. E. 1; C-E5
524. Musgoi III. E; B-C7
525. Musgu III. E; B-D7
526. Muturua III. E; (see 253)
527. Mvuba II. E. 2; D-D5
528. Mwa I. A. 2; A-E7
529. Nafana I. A. 3; A-E7
530. Nalu I. A. 1; A-D2
531. Nama IV. A. 2; D-G4
532. Namnam I. A. 3; A-D9
533. Namshi I. A. 6; B-D6
534. Nandi II. E. 1; D-D6
535. Nangire III. E; B-D8
536. Nankanse I. A. 3; A-D9
537. Nao III. D. 4; C-D4
538. Naron IV. A. 2; D-G5
539. Natioro I. A. 3; A-D7
540. Ndam III. E; B-D8
541. Ndogo I. A. 6; D-D5
542. Ndoro I. A. 5; B-E5
543. Nduka II. E. 2; B-E9
544. Ngala III. E; (see 383)
545. Ngamo III. E; B-C5
546. Ngbandi I. A. 6; D-D5
547. Ngizim III. E; B-B5
548. Nielim I. A. 6; B-D8
549. Nimbari I. A. 6; B-D7
550. Ninzam I. A. 5; B-D4
551. Njalgulgule II. E. 1; D-D5
552. Njei III. E; (see 568)
553. Nogau IV. A. 1; D-G4
554. Nubian II. E. 1; (see individual language)
555. /Nu //En IV. A. 3; D-G4
556. Nuer II. E. 1; C-C2
557. Numu I. A. 2; (see 292)
558. Nungu I. A. 5; B-D4
559. Nunuma I. A. 3; A-D8
560. Nupe I. A. 4; B-D2
561. /Nusan IV. A. 3; D-G4, 5
562. Nwa I. A. 2; A-F7
563. Nyangbo I. A. 4; A-F10
564. Nyangiya II. E. 1; C-F3
565. Nyidu I. A. 5; (see 362)
566. Nyima II. E. 1; C-A1
567. Nzakara I. A. 6; D-D5
568. Nzangi III. E; B-C6
569. Ododop I. A. 5; B-F4
570. Ogoni I. A. 5; B-F3
571. Okpoto-Mteze I. A. 5; B-E3
572. !O !Kung IV. A. 1; D-F5
573. Olulomo I. A. 5; B-F4
574. Otoro I. B. 1; C-B2
575. Pabir III. E; B-C6
576. Pai I. A. 5; B-D4
577. Pajade I. A. 1; (see 57)
578. Pambia I. A. 6; D-D5
579. Pape I. A. 6; B-D6
580. Pero III. E; B-D5
581. Pia III. E; B-D5
582. Piti I. A. 5; B-C, D4
583. Podokwo III. E; B-C6, 7
584. Popoi II. E. 2; D-D5
585. Puguli I. A. 3; A-D8
586. Pyem I. A. 5; B-D4
587. Quara III. D. 2; C-B5
588. Rashad I. B. 2; C-B2
589. Reshe I. A. 5; B-C2
590. Reshiat III. D. 3; (see 243)
591. Ribina I. A. 5; B-C4
592. Roba I. A. 6; B-C6
593. Ron III. E; B-D4
594. Rukuba I. A. 5; B-C, D4
595. Runga II. C; B-D9
596. Saho III. D. 3; D-C6, 7
597. Samo I. A. 2; A-C8
598. Sandawe IV. B; D-E6
599. Sango I. A. 6; D-D5
600. Santrokofi I. A. 4; A-F10
601. Sanye III. D. 5; D-E7
602. Sara II. E. 2; B-D9
603. Sari I. A. 6; B-D6
604. Sarwa III. E; B-C8
605. Seiyawa III. E; B-D4
606. Sere I. A. 6; D-D5
607. Serer-Non I. A. 1; A-B1
608. Serer-Sin I. A. 1; A-B1
609. Sewe I. A. 6; B-D6
610. Shabun I. B. 1; (see 618)
611. Shako III. D. 4; C-D4
612. Shatt II. E. 1; C-B1
613. She III. D. 4; C-D4
614. Shilluk II. E. 1; C-B, C2
615. Shinasha III. D. 4; C-B4
616. Shirawa III. E; B-C5
617. Shoe III. E; (see 383)
618. Shwai I. B. 1; C-B2
619. Sidamo III. D. 3; C-D6
620. Sila II. E. 1; B-C9
621. Sillok II. E. 3; C-B3
622. Sirawa III. E; B-C4
623. Sisala I. A. 3; A-D9
624. Siti I. A. 3; A-E8

625. Sobo I. A. 4; B-F3
626. Sokoro III. E; B-C8
627. Somali III. D. 3; D-D7
628. Somrai III. E; B-D8
629. Songhai II. A; A-A8
630. Soninke I. A. 2; A-B5
631. Suk II. E. 1; D-D6
632. Sukur III. E; B-C6
633. Sungor II. E. 1; D-C5
634. Sura III. E; B-D4
635. Suri II. E. 1; C-D4
636. Surma II. E. 1; (see 673, 728)
637. Susu I. A. 2; A-D3
638. Sya I. A. 2; A-D7
639. Tabi II. E. 1; (see 300)
640. Tacho I. B. 3; (see 673)
641. Tafi I. A. 4; A-F10
642. Tagba I. A. 3; A-E6
643. Tagbo I. A. 6; (see 541)
644. Tagoi I. B. 2; C-B2
645. Tagwana I. A. 3; A-E7
646. Takponin I. A. 3; A-E7
647. Tal III. E; B-D4
648. Talensi I. A. 3; A-D9
649. Talodi I. B. 3; C-B2
650. Tama II. E. 1; D-C5
651. Tambaro III. D. 3; C-D5
652. Tamprusi I. A. 3; A-D9
653. Tana II. E. 2; (see 697)
654. Tangale III. E; B-D5
655. Tara I. A. 3; A-C8
656. Taram I. A. 6; B-D6
657. Tatoga II. E. 1; D-E6
658. Teda II. B; D-B4
659. Tegali I. B. 2; C-B2
660. Teis-um-Danab II. E. 1; (between 684 and 423)
661. Tem I. A. 3; A-E10
662. Teme I. A. 6; B-D6
663. Temein II. E. 1; C-B1
664. Temne I. A. 1; A-E3
665. Tera III. E; B-C5
666. Teso II. E. 1; C-F3
667. Teuso II. E. 1; C-E4
668. Tigong I. A. 5; B-E5
669. Tigre III. A; D-C6
670. Tigrinya III. A; D-C6
671. Tima I. B. 5; C-B1
672. Tira I. B. 1; C-B2
673. Tirma II. E. 1; C-D4
674. Tiv I. A. 5; B-E4
675. Tobote I. A. 3; A-E10
676. Togoyo I. A. 6; (see 541)
677. Topotha II. E. 1; C-E4
678. Tornasi II. E. 3; (see 102)
679. Torona I. B. 3; (see 672)
680. Tsamai III. D. 4; C-E5
681. Tuareg III. C; (not entered)
682. Tuburi III. E; B-D7
683. Tula I. A. 6; B-D5
684. Tuleshi I. B. 4; C-B1
685. Tumak III. E; B-D8
686. Tumale I. B. 2; C-A2
687. Tumtum I. B. 4; C-B2
688. Tur III. E; B-C6
689. Turkana II. E. 1; C-F4
690. Turuka I. A. 3; A-D7
691. Twi I. A. 4; A-G9
692. Uduk II. F; C-B3, 4
693. Uge I. A. 5; (see 116)
694. Ukelle I. A. 5; B-E4
695. Uwassi III. D. 5; D-E6
696. Vai I. A. 2; A-F4
697. Vale II. E. 2; B-E9
698. Vemgo III. E; (see 688)
699. Vere I. A. 6; B-D6
700. Vizik III. E; (see 688)
701. Waja I. A. 6; B-D5
702. Waka I. A. 6; B-D5
703. Wala I. A. 3; A-D8
704. Wara I. A. 3; A-D7
705. Warjawa III. E; B-C4
706. Woga III. E; (see 688)
707. Woko I. A. 6; B-D6
708. Wolamo III. D. 4; C-D5
709. Wolof I. A. 1; A-B2
710. Wom I. A. 6; (see 144)
711. /Xam IV. A. 3; D-H5
712. Yako I. A. 5; B-F4
713. Yakoma I. A. 6; D-D5
714. Yakoro I. A. 5; B-E4
715. Yasing I. A. 6; B-D7
716. Yendang I. A. 6; B-D5
717. Yergam I. A. 5; B-D4
718. Yeskwa I. A. 5; B-D3, 4
719. Yoruba I. A. 4; B-D2
720. Yulu II. E. 2; D-D5
721. Yungur I. A. 6; B-C6
722. Zaghawa II. B; D-C5

723. Zala III. D. 4; C-D5
724. Zande I. A. 6; D-D5
725. Zany III. E; B-C6
726. Zaysse III. D. 4; C-E5
727. Zinna I. A. 6; B-D5
728. Zulmanu II. E. 1; C-D4
729. Zumper I. A. 5; B-E5
730. Zumu III. E; B-D6

• Appendix Two: The African Peoples, their Countries and Names for God

This data is taken from JS Mbiti's book *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970:327 – 336). The list should be studied with the following issues in mind:

a) His research design is the experiment rather than the case study approach we see in Bolaji Idowu, Gabriel Setiloane, and others. As is the case with the experiment design of research, he tests a specific hypothesis through manipulation of independent variable.
b) The data covers more than 270 African ethnic groups and was gathered from nearly two hundred students and authors.
c) Professor Mbiti views the African ethnic groups investigated in his research as representatives of the different phyla of the African Negroes. The ethnic groups functioned as independent variables in the research.
d) The concept of and name for God was the key variable in the research design. As Professor Mbiti moved from one ethnic group to the other, and from one phyla to the next, he recognised that an aspect of his dependent variable, that is the name for God, changed but the concept of God remained basically identical amongst the ethnic groups he investigated.

Abaluyia (Kenya): Wele or Were, Nyasaye, Nabongo (Supreme One), Khakaba (Distributor), Isaywa (One to whom sacred rites are made or paid)
Acholi (Uganda): Juok or Jok, Lubanga
Adjuru (Ivory Coast):* Nyam
Afusare (Nigeria): Daxunum
Akamba (Kenya): Mulungu, Ngai, Mumbi (Creator, Maker, Fashioner), Mwatuangi (Cleaver, Distributor), Asa (Father)
Akan (Ghana): Nyame (Shining One), Nana Nyankopon (Grandfather Nyame who alone is the Great One), Amowia (Giver of light or sun), Amosu (Giver of rain), Amaomee (Giver of sufficiency), Totorobonsu (Causes rain to fall copiously), Brekyirihunuade (He who knows or sees all), Abommubuwafre (Consoler or Comforter who gives salvation), Nyaamanekose (He in whom you confide troubles which come upon you), Tetekwaframua (He who is there now as from ancient times), Nana (Grand Ancestor), Borebore (Excavator, Hewer, Creator, Originator, Inventor, Carver, Architect)
Alur (Uganda, Congo[1]): Jok, Jok Rubanga
Amba (Uganda): Nyakara
Ambo (Zambia): Lesa, Cuta (Creator)
Ankore (Uganda): Ruhanga (Creator), Nyamuhanga (Creator), Omuhangi (Creator), Rugaba (Giver), Kazooba (Sun), Mukameiguru (He who rules or reigns in the sky)
Anuak (Sudan): Juok
Arusha (Tanzania):* Engai
Ashanti (Ghana, Ivory Coast): Nyame, Onyankopon (Alone, the Great One), Bore-Bore (the First, Creator of all things), Otumfoo (the Powerful One), Otomankoma (the Eternal One), Ananse Kokroko (the Great Spider, the Wise One), Onyankopon Kwame (the Great One who appeared on Saturday)
Aushi (Zambia): Makumba
Azande (Sudan): Mbori or Mboli, Bapaizegino

Bachwa (Congo): Djakomba, Djabi
Bacongo (Angola): Nzambi
Bakene (Uganda): Gasani, Kibumba(?) (Creator?)
Bakwena[2] (Botswana): Modimo
Balese (Congo): Katshonde, Tole, Mongo, Mbali, Londi
Baluba (Congo): Leza, Lesa-Waba, Kalunga Nyembo(?)
Bambara (Mali):* Jalang
Bambuti (Congo): Arebati, Epilipili, Baatsi
Bamileke (Cameroon): Si
Bamum (Cameroon): Njinyi or Nui (He who is everywhere, He who sees and hears everything), Yorubang
Banen (Cameroon): Hoel, Kolo, Ombang (Above, Up Above)
Banyarwanda (Rwanda): Imana, Hategekimana (God only rules) Hashakimana (God only plans), Habyarimana (God only brings forth children), Ndagijimana (In God I entrust my property), Habimana (God only lives), Bizimana (God knows all things), Bigirimana (God has all things), Ruremakwaci
Banyoro (Uganda): Ruhanga (Creator)
Bari (Sudan): Ngun
Barotse (Zambia): Lesa, Nyambe
Barundi (Burundi): Imana, Rangicavyose and Rugiravyose (Almighty), Indavyi (Watcher of everything), Rurema (Creator), Rugoba (Owner of everything), Haragakiza and Harerimana (Saviour), Rutunga (Protector), Rutangaboro (Protector of the poor), Segaba (Governor), Umusemyi (Creator), Mushoboravyose (Almighty), Nyeninganyi (Powerful, Owner of all powers), Rushoboravyose (He is surprised by nothing), Ntakimunanira (He does no evil), Inchanyi (the Fire), Ruremabibondo (Maker of children), Rufashaboro (He is merciful), Ntirandekuva (He has not let me drop yet)
Basa (Nigeria):* Agwatana (Sun)
Basoga (Uganda): Kibumba (Creator), Kiduma (God of rain, wind, and thunderstorm), Kyaka (God of Lightning), Nambubi, Lubanga
Basuto (Lesotho): Molimo
Bavenda (S. Africa): Raluvhimba, Mwari
Baya (Central African Republics):* So, Zambi (Creator)
Beir (Sudan): Tummu
Bemba (Zambia): Lesa
Bena (Tanzania): Mulungu
Berta (Ethiopia): –?–
Binawa (Nigeria): Kashiri
Birifor (Ghana):* We (Sun), Nawe, Wene, Yini
Bondei (Tanzania): Mlungu
Bongo (Sudan): Loma, Hege
Boran (Ethiopia, Kenya):* Waqa
Bulu (Cameroon): Mebee (the One who bears the world)
Burji-Konso (Ethiopia): Illalei, Bambelle, Adosheba(?)
Bushmen (Botswana): Urezhwa (Creator?)
Butawa (Nigeria): Kashiri(?)

Chagga (Tanzania): Ruwa (Sun)
Chawai (Nigeria): Bawai (Mba = Father; Wai = Sun)
Chewa (Malawi):* Mulungu, Namalenga, Leza, Cham'njili, Mphambe, Chisumphi, Chanta, Mlengi, Mlamulili, Mcizi, Mpulumutsi, Mlezi, (Caretaker of Children), Wolera (same as Mlezi), Mtetezi, Muweluzi
Chokwe (Angola):* Kalunga, Zambi
Chopi (Mozambique):* Tilo (Sky)

Darasa (Ethiopia): –?–
Didinga (Sudan): Tamukujen (the One over the rain)
Digo (Kenya): Mulungu
Dilling (Sudan):* Abradi (Maker)
Dinka (Sudan): Nhialic (In the Above), Acek, Jok
Dogon (Upper Volta, Mali): Amma
Dorei (Nigeria): Nillah
Dorobo (Kenya): Asis (Sun), Tururit (Above?)
Duala (Cameroon):* Loba, Owasi, Iwonde, Ebasi (Omnipotent Father)
Dungi (Nigeria): Kasiri or Kashira
Duruma (Kenya): Mulungu

Ebrie (Ivory Coast):* Nyangka
Edo (Nigeria): Osanobua, Osa
Egede (Nigeria): Ohe
Ekoi (Cameroon, Nigeria):* Osawa, Nsi
Elgeyo (Kenya): Asis (Sun)
Embu (Kenya): Ngai
Ewe (Dahomey, Ghana, Togo): Mawu
Fajulu (Sudan): Ngun
Fang (Cameroon, Gabon, Spanish Guinea):* Nzame, Nyame
Fanti (Ghana):* Nyame, Nyankopon
Fingo (S. Africa):* Qamata
Fon (Dahomey): Mawu-Lisa

Ga (Ghana): Dzemawon, Numbo
Gaalin (Sudan):* Allat, Uzza, Manat
Galla (Ethiopia, Kenya): Waqa
Ganda (Uganda): Katonda (Creator), Kagingo (Creator, Master of life), Mukama (Master), Ssewannaku (the Eternal), Ddunda (Pastor), Lugaba (Giver), Ssebintu (Master of all things), Liisoddene (the Great Eye), Nnyiniggulu (the heaven is his), Kazooba (He who has seen many, many moon-periods, the Everlasting One), Namuginga (the One who shapes), Ssewaunaku (He who has pity on the poor and the suffering), Gguluddene (He who is gigantic, the Great One), Namugereka (He who arranges and distributes according to his discretion)
Gbari (Nigeria):* Shekohi, Sheshu, Soko, Esse, Sheko
Gelaba (Ethiopia): Yer
Gikuyu (Kenya): Murungu, Ngai, Mwenenyaga (Possessor of whiteness)
Gimira-Maji (Ethiopia): Dau(?)
Giryama (Kenya): Mulungu
Gisu (Uganda): Weri or Wele, Omubumbi (Creator), Wele Wehangagi
Gofa (Ethiopia): Tsuossa, Buolla(?)
Gogo (Tanzania):* Mulungu
Grunshi (Ghana):* We
Gumuz (Ethiopia): Robboqua, Fogatza, Musa or Musa Gueza
Gusii (Kenya):* Erioba (Sun)
Gwere (Uganda):* Kibumba (Creator)

Hadya (Ethiopia): Wa'a
Hadzapi (Tanzania): –?–
Haya (Tanzania): Ishwanga
Hehe (Tanzania):* Nguluvi
Herero (S.W. Africa): Ndjambi Karunga, Mukuru
Hottentots (S. Africa): Utixo

Ibibio (Nigeria): Abassi, Chuku
Idoma (Nigeria): Owo, Owoico
Igbira (Nigeria): Hinegba, Ihinegba
Igbo (Nigeria): Chuku (Great Spirit), Chi, Chineke (Creator)
Ijaw (Nigeria):* Egbesu (Supreme Protector)
Ila (Zambia): Leza, Chilenga (Creator), Lubumba (Moulder), Shakapanga (Constructor), Namulenga (Creator), Mutalabala (Everlasting), Namakungwe (Originator, He from whom all things came), Muninde (Guardian), Chaba (Giver, Allotter), Ipaokubozha (He who gives and causes to rot), Ushatwakwe (Master, Owner of his things), Shakatabwa (the Faller), Mangwe (the Flooder), Shakemba or Kemba (Rain-Giver), Namesi (Water-Giver), Munamazuba (He of the suns, the Everlasting One), Luvhunabaumba (Deliverer of those in trouble), Mukubwe (Destroyer?), Chembwe (He who takes away till there is only one left), Munakasungwe (Leader), Chaba-wakaaba-ochitadiwa (the Giver who gives also what cannot be eaten), Shikakunamo (the Besetting One)
Indem (Nigeria): Osowo
Ingassana (Ethiopia): Tel (Sun)
Isoko, *see* Urhobo
Itsekiri (Nigeria): Oritse
Iyala (Nigeria): Owo

Jie (Uganda): Akuj
Jukun (Nigeria):* Shido or Chido (Sky God), Ama or Ma
Jumjum (Sudan): Dyong

Kadara (Nigeria): Onum (Sun)
Kafa (Ethiopia):* Yaro (Sky God)
Kagoro (Nigeria): Gwaza (Universe)
Kaibi (Nigeria): Kashiri or Kashira
Kaje (Nigeria): –?–
Kakwa (Sudan): Nguleso (God in the sky)
Kaliko (Sudan): Andragi(?)
Kamasya (Kenya): Asis
Kaonde (Zambia): Lesa
Karamoja (Uganda): Akuj
Karanga (Rhodesia): Nyadenga (He who is in, or owns the sky)
Katab (Nigeria): Gwaza
Kemant (Ethiopia):* Sanbat (Sabbath deified, female)
Kiga (Uganda): Ruhanga, Sebahanga (Fashioner), Kazoba (the One who makes the sun set), Rugaba (the One who gave everything on this earth and can also take it away), Biheko (He who carried everyone on his back)
Kipsigis (Kenya): Asis, Chebtalel, Chebongolo (Sun)
Kissi (Guinea, Liberia):* Hala (Sky God)
Kitimi (Nigeria): Kashila or Kashiri
Koma (Ethiopia): Yere Siezi, War, Wal
Konjo (Congo, Uganda): Nyamahanga (Creator of all)
Konkomba (Ghana, Togo):* Omborr

Kono (Sierra Leone): Meketa (the Everlasting One), Yataa (the One you meet everywhere)
Konso (Ethiopia):* Bamballe, Adota (Sun), Waq
Konta (Ethiopia): –?–
Kony (Kenya): Asis
Korekore (Rhodesia): Wokumusoro (the One Above), Musiki (Creator), Chikara (Creator), Dzivaguru (the Big Pool)
Kpe (Cameroon):* Lova or Loba
Kpelle (Liberia): Yala
Kuca (Ethiopia): Tosso
Kuku (Sudan): Uletet, Ngulaitait or Nguletet
Kullo (Ethiopia): Tosa
Kuba (Congo):* Nceme, Mbombo, Njambe
Kung (S.W. Africa):* Khu, Xu, Xuba, Huwa (Creator and Upholder)
Kurama (Nigeria): Ashili, Bakashili
Kyiga (Uganda): Weri

Lala (Zambia): Lesa, Mulenga (Creator of all), Cuuta, Lucele (He who is heard in the world, Lord of life)
Lamba (Zambia): Lesa
Lango (Uganda): Jok
Lele (Congo): Njambi
Lendu (Congo): Gindri
Limba (Sierra Leone): Kanu, Masala, Masaranka
Lobi (Ivory Coast):* Tangba You
Lodagaa (Ghana, Upper Volta): Na'angmin
Logo (Congo): Tore, Ore, Ori, Djuka
Lokoiya (Sudan): Oicok
Lotuko (Sudan): Ajok, Naijok
Lozi (Zambia): Nyambe
Luapula (Zambia): Lesa
Lugbara (Congo, Uganda): Adroa or Adronga (God in the sky, Transcendent), Adro (God on earth, Immanent)
Luguru (Tanzania):* Mulungu
Luimbe (Angola):* Nzambi, Kalunga
Lunda-Luena (Angola, Congo, Zambia): Nzambi, Kalunga
Luo (Kenya): Nyasaye, Wang' Chieng', Nyakolaga, Were (Father of grace), Tham, Wuonwa (Our Father), Wuon kwere (Father of the "ancestors"), Wuon ji (Father of all), Ja Mrima (the One with a temper), Jan'gwono (the kind One), Jahera (of pity, mercy, and kindness), Nyakalaga (the dragging One, the Ancient of days), Janen (Seer), Wuon Ogendni (the Origin and Father of all peoples), Hono (Worker of miracles), Polo (God of the heavens), Wuon lowo (Owner of the earth), Ratego (Almighty, Owner of power), Jalweny (the Great Soldier), Kwar ji (Grandfather of all), Rahuma (the God of fame), Piny k'nyal (the Unconquerable One), Wuon oru (the Owner of the coming days), Ruodh Ruodhi (King of kings)
Luvedu (S. Africa): Khuzwane (Creator), Mwari

Maasai (Kenya, Tanzania): En-kai (Rain, Sky), N'gai, Ai, Parsai (the One who is worshipped), Emayian (the One who blesses)
Madi (Uganda): Ori, Rabanga
Makaraka (Sudan): Mboli
Male (Ethiopia): Sosi
Malinge (Guinea, Mali):* Gala, Guele, Jalang
Mamvu-Mangutu (Congo): Mai, Oti, Tore, Kundumbendu, Oto
Mao (Ethiopia): Yere, Yeretsi
Marakwet (Kenya): Asis(?)
Maravi (Malawi): Mulungu(?)

Masongo (Ethiopia): Waqaio
Matengo (Malawi):* Ciuta, Mulungu, Mlezi, Cisumphi (Creator)
Meban (Sudan): Juong
Mekan (Ethiopia): Tuma
Mende (Sierra Leone): Ngewo, Leve (the High up One)
Meru (Kenya): Murungu, Ngai, Mwene inya (the Owner of force, Almighty)
Mondari (Sudan): Ngun
Moru (Sudan): Lu
Mossi (Upper Volta):* Winnam, Ouennam, Winde, Naba Zidiwinde (all these names mean Sun)
Murle (Ethiopia): Tummu

Nama (S.W. Africa):* Tsui-Goab (Supreme Being), Cagn or Kaang (Creator of all), Khub (Ruler), Nanub (Thundercloud)
Nandi (Kenya): Asis, Cheptalil (He who has dazzling or who gleams), Chepkeliensokol or Chepkelienpokol (something with nine (or a hundred) legs—in reference to the sun's rays), Chepopkoiyo, Chebonamuni
Ndebele (Rhodesia): Unkulunkulu, Umlimo, Mwali
Ndogo (Sudan): Mbiri, Mviri
Ngombe (Congo): Akongo, Bilikonda (the Everlasting One of the forest), Ebangala (the Beginner), Ebangala-e-mokonda (the One who began the forest), Eliamokonda (the One who clears the forest), Elimalima (the One who fills everything), Endandala (the Unexplainable)
Ngonde (Malawi):* Kyala, Mbepo Mwikemo, Ndolombwike, Kamanyi-manyi, Mpoki
Ngoni (Malawi): Unkurukuru, Utixo, Inkosi, Umkulunqango (the Great Deviser), Uluhlanga (the Original Source), Umkulu Kakulu (the Greatest of all), Umnikaze we zinto zonke (the Owner of all things)
Nkum (Nigeria): Oshowo, Ebutokpabi
Nkundo (Congo):* Djakomba
Nuba (Sudan): Kalo, Elo, Bel, Bel Epti (God the Maker), Kando (Sky), Kwarak (Sky God), Masala (the Great Mother), Elem (Fashioner, Moulder)
Nuer (Sudan): Kwoth
Nupe (Nigeria): Soko
Nyakyusa (Tanzania): Kyala, Tenende (Owner of all things), Nkurumuke (the Undying One, the Everlasting One), Chata (the Originator), Kyaubiri (the Invisible, the Unseen), Kalesi (the Omnipresent, He who is everywhere present), Ndorombwike (Creator), Mperi (Maker)
Nyamwezi, *see* Sukuma
Nyanja (Zambia, Malawi): Mulungu, Cuata, Leza, Mphamba (Excelling, Almighty), Cisumphi (Omnipresent), Cimjili (the Almighty One who has to be feared), Namalenga or Nyamalenga or Mlengi (Creator)

Orri (Nigeria): Lokpata
Ovambo (S.W. Africa): Kalunga, Pamba (Chief), Mbangu, Mufifi
Ovimbundu (Angola): Suku (He who supplies the needs of his creatures)

Pare (Tanzania): Kyumbi (Creator?), Mrungu, Izuva (Sun)
Piti (Nigeria): Ure
Pokomo (Kenya):* Muungu
Pondo (S. Africa):* uDali (Creator), uMenzi (Worker), u Tixo
Pygmy (Congo): Kmvoum
Pyem (Nigeria): Wudidi

Rabai (Kenya): Mulungu
Rishuwa (Nigeria): Kashiri, Kasiri
Rukuba (Nigeria): Katakuru
Rumaiya (Nigeria): Kashillo, Kashira

Safwa (Tanzania):* Nguruvi (Sun)
Sakata (Congo):* Nja
Sandawe (Tanzania): Waronge, Murungu
Sangama (Ethiopia): Zabi
Sebei (Uganda): Oiki, Oinotet
Serer (Gambia, Senegal): Rog (Creator)
Sherbro-Bullom-Krim (Sierra Leone): Hobatoke
Shilluk (Sudan): Juok
Shona (Rhodesia): Mwari, Nyadenga (He who is in, or owns, the sky, the Great One of the sky), Wokumusoro (the One above), Gore (the One amongst the clouds), Runji, Chipindikure (the One who can turn things up-side-down), Chirozva-mauya (the One with power to destroy completely), Chirazamauya, Sagomakoma (the Owner of many things), Musiki (Creator), Muvumbi (Moulder, Fashioner), Marure (Creator), Musikavanhu (Creator of human beings), Dzivaguru (the Big Pool), Chidziva (the Little Pool), Mutangakugara (the One who existed in the beginning), Muwanikwa (the One who was just found to exist, the Eternal), Mupavose (One who gives to all), Wemumbepo, Muponesi, Muyaradzi, Muratidzi
Sidamo (Ethiopia): Magano
Songhay (Nigeria): Yerkoy
Sonjo (Tanzania): Mugwe, Riob
Sotho (Lesotho):* Molimo, Molimo o matla (God of all power, Almighty)
Srubu (Nigeria): Kasiri, Kahiri
Suk (Kenya): Tororut (Sky), Ilat (Rain)
Sukuma-Nyamwezi (Tanzania): Mulungu, Mungu, Seba, Kube (the One who embraces all), Kube-Nyangasa (the One who furnishes us with what we need, the One who fits all things together), Limi (Sun), Linyabangwe (Creator), Liwelelo, Ng'wenekili (the Owner of everything), Ling'wenekili (the Great Owner), Likubala (the One who embraces all, the Great Counter, the One who counts and follows every step)[3]
Suri-Surma (Ethiopia): Tuma
Swazi (Swaziland): Mkulumncandi (the Great First One), Umkhulumncandi, Inkosatana, Umvelingquangi
Tallensi (Ghana, Upper Volta):* We (Sun), Wene (Sky God), Nawe, Nabwe
Teita (Kenya): Mlungu
Tembu (S. Africa):* uTixo
Temne (Sierra Leone): Kuru, Kurumasaba
Tenda (Guinea):* Hounounga (the Unknown)
Teso (Uganda): Akuj (Sky, Firmament)
Teuso (Uganda): Didikwari, Nakwit
Thonga (S. Africa, Mozambique):* Tilo (Heavens), Hosi (Chief), Xikwembu
Tikar (Cameroon): Nyooiy
Tiv (Nigeria): Aondo (Heavens)
Tlhaping (S. Africa):* Modimo
Tonga (Malawi, Zambia): Tilo, Chiuta or Ciuta, Leza (Lightning), Mlengi (Creator), Chata (Creator), Nyangoi, Wamu yaya (Everlasting), Wanthazizose (Almighty), Mkana Nyifwa (He who never dies), Kajati (Self-Creator), Mtaski (Saviour), Msungi (Sustainer), Mlezi (Food-Giver), Mlengavuwa (Creator of rain), Mnanda, Mananda, Mangazi

[3] Apart from the first three names here, the rest were supplied by P. Schöneberger, "Names for 'God' known and used by the Nyamwezi", *Anthropos*, 56(1961), 947 ff., and in a personal communication.

Toposa (Sudan): Nakwuge
Toro (Uganda): Nkya, Ruhanga, Kagaba, Nyamahanga
Tswana (Botswana, S. Africa): Modimo
Tumbuka (Malawi): Chiuta (the Great Bow in the heavens), Mulengi (Creator), Leza, Mwati (Designer), Mweni-Nkongono (Almighty), Kajilengi (Self-Creator), Wamtatakuya (Eternal), Cinyetenyete (Immanent), Mweneco (Owner of all things), Mupi (Giver of all things), Cilera-balanda (the Upkeeper or Guardian of Orphans), Karonga wa mabanja (Lord of hosts: The writer cannot ascertain whether this is the traditional name or one borrowed from the Bible), Cimbatakwinya (the Great One), Kamphanda (Alone), Kamanyi-manyi (Omniscient), Wamalumya
Turkana (Kenya): Akuj (Up, Above)
Turu (Tanzania): Murungu, Matunda (Creator)
Twi peoples (Dahomey, Ghana): Onyankopon

Udhuk (Ethiopia): Arumgimis
Urhobo-Isoko (Nigeria): Oghene, Oghenukpabe

Vai (Liberia):* Kamba (Big Space)
Vili (Congo):* Nzambi Mpungu
Vugusu (Kenya): Wele

Walamo (Ethiopia): Tosa
Warjawa (Nigeria): –?–
Watumbatu (Zanzibar-Tanzania): –?–

Xam (S. Africa):* Kaang, Kaggen, Huwu or Huwe
Xhosa (S. Africa):* uThixo, uDali (Maker, Creator), uMenzi, uHlanga, Qamata

Yachi (Nigeria): Phahia
Yako (Nigeria):* Ubasi (Creator)
Yao (Malawi, Mozambique): Mulungu
Yoruba (Nigeria): Olodumare (Almighty, Supreme), Olorun (the Owner or Lord of heaven), Olofin-Orun

Zala (Ethiopia): Tsosa
Zinza (Tanzania): Isewahanga (Creator?), Kazoba, Rugaba
Zulu (S. Africa): Unkulunkulu, Inkosi (Chief, Lord), uDumakade (He who thunders from far-off times), uGobungqongqo (He who bends down even majesties), uGuqabadele (the Irresistible), uKqili (the Wise One), uMabonga-kutuk-izizwe-zonke (He who roars so that all nations be struck with terror), uSomnganiso (the Greatest of friends), uZivelele (He who is of himself, the Self-existent One)

• Appendix Three: Distribution of Christianity in Africa

The map below shows the current situation of Christianity in Africa. From the map it is clear that Ghana, Southern Nigeria and the southern two thirds of Africa has become predominantly Christian. Note that by 1998, statistics put the African population at 800 million (AISA, 1998:13) and the population of the African Christians at 370 million (see Mbiti, 1999:1). There are two important observations to be made here: Firstly, the Christian expansion has exploded in the southern two thirds of Africa. Secondly, this is the region that is dominated by the Bantu – a sub-family of the Niger-Congo phylum. Could one conclude from these observations that the NTU metaphysics will be of increasing significance to Christian thought in the southern two thirds of Africa given the statistical significance of the Christian faith in this region?

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